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A MYSTERY STORY FOR GIRLS

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Escape by Night

ALICE ANSON

This is my book

St. Paul
Minnesota

Marilyn Hunsaker

582 Hall Ave

Ri 1066

Wendy snapped the switch marked "On".

"Escape by Night"

(See Page 160)

Escape by Night

By

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Author of
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ILLUSTRATED

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By ALICE ANSON

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ESCAPE BY NIGHT

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ESCAPE BY NIGHT

PROLOGUE

THERE WAS *no one else in the music shop when the plump stranger entered, and the young clerk sprang to attention.*

"I want to see your portable radios," the customer announced, a hint of a foreign accent in his voice.

"This Zephyr has been a very popular model," the clerk said. "We've re-ordered twice, and a shipment of a dozen just came in this morning. Five tubes, with a built-in-aerial—"

"Never mind that," the stranger broke in, impatiently. He produced a tape measure, and carefully checked the dimensions of the small radio with some figures on a card, which he extracted from a fat wallet.

The clerk, staring, was silent.

"Hmmmm. Yes. That will do. Is there a special price for all twelve?"

"I—I don't know. I'll ask the manager. He's back in the office. . . ."

The plump man waited, his wallet open. Outside his black limousine was headed north.

The rabbity little music instructor waited until the clerk had sold the Los Angeles high school boys a half dozen of the latest dance records.

When the shop quieted, after the noisy exit, the clerk turned courteously to the customer. "More music manuscript this morning, sir? How's the great opus coming?"

"Slowly, slowly. I'm leaving on a vacation in Wisconsin. I hope to get a lot done on it this summer. No. No manuscript this morning." He smiled shyly. "I have rather a big order. How many portable Zephyrs, Model Twelve, do you have in stock?"

The clerk, startled, said, "Just a minute. I'll have to look it up."

A moment later he glanced up from a book at the cashier's desk, and replied, "We have eight on the counters and a dozen not yet unpacked."

"I'll take all of them," the little man ordered. "Gifts for my pupils," he explained hastily, at the amazement registered in the clerk's face. "I don't want them to forget me while I'm away this summer."

"This is a good street," the middle-aged man in the baggy suit remarked to his companion, as

he dexterously parked the old sedan with the New York license plates. "A half dozen music stores within two blocks. Remember, not more than two portable Zephyrs, Model Twelve, from each place."

"I still think it would be better to get just one in a joint, and pick up the others as we go across the country," his companion grumbled.

"This way, we can pack them before we leave," the first man explained. "Come on, get going. We've got a busy night before we leave for Wisconsin in the morning."

CHAPTER I

AN IMPORTANT LETTER

FOR THE first time in the ten years that Uncle Ed had been her guardian, Wendy Ralston was afraid of him.

The seventeen-year-old girl knew that his reply to her vital request would decide her whole future.

Her knees felt wobbly and the slender fingers that held the letter trembled as she followed the path through the woods to his workshop. She took a deep breath, tossed her curly mane of honey-colored hair in a characteristic courageous gesture, and knocked on the rustic door. "It's Wendy!" she called.

"Come in."

She opened the door of the small log cabin where her crippled uncle spent his days patiently carving the wooden boat models he sold to gift shops. The gray-haired man looked up from his work. He smiled and rested his hands on the wide board across the wheel chair. "What brings you to my lair, fair maiden?"

Wendy plunged right in. "Uncle Ed, I've got

a tremendous favor to ask. It's just about the most important thing that ever happened to me." Wendy's cheeks were bright with color. Her eyes sparkled with eagerness.

The man leaned back in his chair and reached in the pocket of his shabby sweater for a pipe. "Let's hear it," he answered gravely. A deep frown wrinkled his forehead.

"I haven't said much about it, because I realize that it has been out of the question—financially. But now that I'm graduating from high school, I do want desperately to go to Cornell University and take a course in hotel management."

Her uncle puffed sadly at his pipe. "My dear child—"

"But, listen, Uncle Ed! I have a chance to earn the money!" She waved the letter, excitedly. "This came today! A man—a Mr. Schmidt of Fort Worth—wants to rent a whole suite of rooms at Edgewater Inn! Isn't that just wonderful? This is the chance I've been waiting for!" Wendy glanced quizzically at her uncle.

"Open the hotel after ten years? Why, Wendy, it would take a thousand dollars just to get it ready!" The older man's expression was dark and troubled.

"But listen to the letter!" She read in her clear, low voice:

"May 1, 194—
Shelton Hotel
Fort Worth, Texas

Proprietors
Edgewater Inn
Cottey, Wis.

Dear Sirs:

I should like to engage a suite of four rooms with two baths for my wife, son, his tutor and myself. My chauffeur will also require a small room. I should be willing to pay two hundred dollars per week for the five of us, American plan.

If everything is satisfactory, we should require the rooms from May 15th to September 1st or 15th.

Very truly yours,
W. D. Schmidt"

"It's a very generous offer," Uncle Ed admitted. "But it's a new idea. I'll have to have a little time to think it over."

"I've already figured out that if they stay until the first of September it will amount to fifteen weeks. Three thousand dollars, Uncle Ed!" Wendy was bubbling with eagerness. "And even if it cost a thousand dollars to get the hotel slicked up, our expenses shouldn't be more than another thousand, and that would give me a thousand

dollars for school! And if the hotel were open, we'd be bound to attract more guests—"

"And you'd have more expenses," Uncle Ed pointed out. "You and Sarah couldn't do all the work, even for five people. Have you said anything to her about it?"

Wendy chuckled. "Do you think I'd approach Sarah before I had your gold-plated O. K.? Would I put my head in a lion's mouth?"

Sarah Marks was the dour-faced Scotswoman who had been housekeeper at Edgewater Inn for more years than Wendy could remember. After the tragic death of Wendy's parents in a sailing accident ten years before, she had stayed on to make a home in one wing of the rambling summer resort hotel for the child and her crippled uncle. She ruled the establishment with unquestioned authority, though Wendy and her uncle had been secret partners in many schemes to outwit her iron-bound decisions.

Uncle Ed smiled. "But this is a pretty big plan, Wendy. If we should decide to go ahead with it, much of the success would depend on Sarah's help and co-operation."

"I know. But if she thinks it's a good one—"

"She may," Uncle Ed broke in, "but I still don't think you realize what a risk it would be for all three of us, my dear. If I were to raise a thou-

sand dollars, it would mean mortgaging Edgewater Inn. And if Mr. Schmidt and his party weren't satisfied, they might go somewhere else along the shore for the rest of the season, and we should lose the Inn. You, Sarah and I would be homeless—and penniless."

Wendy's face went white. She folded the letter and tucked it into a pocket of her tailored blue slack suit. "It's true, Uncle Ed. I hadn't —hadn't given much thought to the risk. I was just selfish. I was thinking of only what it would mean to me."

"Don't misunderstand, Wendy," her uncle said, gently. "I'm not saying a definite no. I'm just asking for a little time to consider it carefully."

There was the raucous noise of an outboard motor from the lake shattering the quiet of the woods.

"It's Duke," Wendy explained, cheerful again. "We're all going out to the Island on a picnic to celebrate being seniors and being excused from exams."

"Be careful," her uncle warned. "And I'll give you the answer this evening."

Wendy kissed him, and then ran down the path to the kitchen door of Edgewater Inn for her basket. She waved good-bye to Sarah, who was

briskly cleaning the windows of the big kitchen.

Eva Shaver, a blonde, slender and rather shy girl who was Wendy's best friend, was waiting in the boat with Waldemar Windsor, fortunately known as "Duke."

"Hurry, Wendy!" he called. "The others have already gone over!"

Wendy smiled in greeting her friends from the dock. Eva reached for her basket, adding it to the others in the bow of the boat. Wendy scrambled down the weather-beaten ladder and took her place on the center seat.

"Cross your fingers, both of you," Duke ordered, "and maybe the motor'll start on the first try."

Wendy winked at Eva and did as she was commanded. Duke firmly believed in signs, and his friends good-naturedly joined in all his pet good-luck tricks. Duke solemnly flipped the cord, and the motor caught on the first try. He smiled triumphantly; Eva pulled in the rope looped around one of the piles under the dock, and they were off in a burst of noise.

It was a glorious day, and the Island was a favorite spot of the gang for their picnics. They played all sorts of silly games, laughed a lot, and built a roaring fire for the steaks.

After they had eaten, they sat around and talked about plans for the summer, and for college in the fall.

Duke's plans were no secret. For years, he'd been interested in aviation. He told them now of a letter he'd had from Steve Booth, a Cottey high school graduate of three years before.

"I thought I'd have to go to college four years before I could hope to get in Navy Aviation," he exulted, "but Steve's grades were high enough so that he was accepted after only two years. Next week he'll be a full-fledged Ensign. Gosh, Pensacola must be a swell place. I hope I get sent there—but by that time there'll be a dozen new air bases for us to get our training."

Eva announced, shyly, that her credits had been accepted at a school for fashion design in Chicago. She'd be leaving late in September to start the ground work for her career.

All chattered excitedly about their immediate futures—except Wendy.

Eva finally noticed her silence and said, "You're so quiet today. Is something wrong?"

"I noticed it, too," Marie Benson added swiftly. "What *is* the matter, Wendy?"

The girl in the blue slack suit sighed, and glanced around the circle of friendly faces. "You

were all so—so gay about your plans, I didn't think you'd enjoy hearing about my difficulties," she told them.

"Why, Wendy!"

"Do tell us what's wrong!"

Duke was the acknowledged leader of the gang. "Maybe it's something we can help you with," he pointed out, reasonably.

With a rush of words, then, Wendy told her friends about the letter and her disappointing talk with her uncle.

"You've just got to do it," Duke decided, enthusiastically. "I knew something important would come up today. I found *eleven* four-leaf clovers before breakfast this morning!"

"You can do it, Wendy! You always finish everything you start with flying colors," Eva told her, loyally.

"What's more, we could all help get the hotel in shape," Pete Shipton added. "It would be fun."

The others joined in eagerly with offers of assistance. They were all jabbering at once. Wendy laughed and covered her ears with her hands.

Duke shouted: "Hey! Listen!" and after a few minutes, they did. "See here, Wendy, if we all helped with the painting and stuff, it wouldn't

cost any thousand bucks to get the Inn ready."

Wendy was close to tears of joy at the spontaneous helpfulness of her friends, but she managed to say, "You don't all realize how much equipment it takes. We've been using up all the old sheets and towels during these ten years that the Edgewater Inn has been closed. We'd need new bed-spreads and curtains and fresh paper on the walls—"

"We could have a couple of all-day Tom Sawyer parties," Duke interrupted. "There's a swell new water paint that can go on right over the old wallpaper, and it's a lot of fun to splash it around."

"Let's start tomorrow!" Eva's thin face was pink with excitement. "We could wash all the windows and scrub the floors, and get the rooms ready for painting. You wouldn't have to buy any furniture, would you, Wendy?"

The color was flooding back into Wendy's cheeks, and her hazel eyes sparkled. "Who could fail, with such loyal friends? But please don't talk to me too fast. You see, if Uncle Ed says we can't do it—we can't, that's all. And then, there's Sarah—"

Duke whistled. "I'd forgotten her. Your uncle's easy, Wendy. You know if he thought you really wanted to do it, he wouldn't refuse. But

Sarah's going to take a little managing, I can see."

Eva giggled and made a daring suggestion. "Why don't we all meet tomorrow morning at eight o'clock, and just pile in the Edgewater Inn with scrub buckets and brooms and brushes?"

" 'In Union there is Strength,' " Duke quoted, pompously. "We'll take her like Grant took Richmond—we'll overwhelm her with superior forces and equipment—"

In spite of Wendy's pleading with them to wait until she talked with her uncle again, the plans were completed.

Wendy forgot the risk, too, carried away by the group's enthusiasm.

When she went home at dusk she fingered the letter in her pocket reassuringly. Instead of the lone light from the kitchen window, she could imagine Edgewater Inn ablaze with lights and gay with music and laughter.

Ablaze with lights! Wendy sighed for the millions of dark homes and hotels and apartments across the Atlantic. She gave a little prayer of gratitude that even the lone light from Edgewater Inn could shine bravely across the lawn in America.

There was no premonition in her heart as she felt the letter that it might be the start in a chain

of events which could mean a blackout for her own continent.

"Dear Mr. Schmidt!" she laughed to herself. "Do bring us luck!"

Duke, later, claimed it all happened because Wendy forgot to cross her fingers and look at the first star of evening when she made her wish.

But all luck, Wendy was to learn, can't be good.

CHAPTER II

START OF THE WHIRL

THE NEXT two weeks were so filled with activity and incidents that Wendy remembered her graduation from high school as a hazy blur. There was the day that Uncle Ed, dressed in an unaccustomed business suit, had Duke and Wendy push him in his wheel-chair down the busy highway to Cottey. He mortgaged Edgewater Inn for a thousand dollars and was unhappy about the harsh terms.

Sarah, as always, was disapproving and silent. She marched the airy corridors, inspecting the freshly-painted rooms with the bright spreads and clucking over each speck of dust the girls had missed.

Wendy answered Mr. Schmidt's letter, and he wired his reservation—for a week's trial! It was the only time that Wendy remembered her uncle's laughing during the whole busy time. "He's reserving his suite by telegraph," he chuckled, "and he doesn't know he could have the whole hotel!"

But there was another request for a room.

Miss Susan Abbott, who had come to Edgewater Inn as a girl, wanted to return. She was now a trained nurse and dietitian. She wrote that she would like to come to Edgewater Inn for the season and serve in her capacities. She could administer first aid, and she could plan menus and do the marketing in return for board and room.

Wendy read the letter to her uncle. He liked the idea of having an older, experienced person assisting with menus and marketing. Duke, too, thought it was a swell idea. He'd just seen three white horses and that was a very good sign. Sarah sniffed, and muttered darkly about "someone else messin' around in her good kitchen" then went off to count the new sheets, once more.

It was Duke who found the sign—appropriately. He and Pete were exploring up in the big old attic, when they happened upon the EDGEWATER INN sign which had hung at the gate years before. Pete and he freshened it with new green and white paint, and for good luck, added a border of four-leaf clovers.

The boys hung it at sunset, at the moment all Cottey loved, when the sun, huge and blazing, dropped into the waters of Lake Lester.

Exhausted from their busy days of preparing Edgewater Inn for the first guests, the gang gath-

ered around and sang. Uncle Ed, smoking his pipe, rested in his wheel-chair on the verandah. Sarah, now that no one could see, permitted herself a thin smile as she watched the ceremony from the deserted dining room.

They were all a little startled when the big, black limousine drove in from the highway. Eva, Wendy and Arline Jackson, had to scramble out of the way quickly.

The chauffeur stopped the sleek car and sprang out to open the door for a stout, red-faced man with a short, bristling haircut.

"Miss Ralston?" He looked inquiringly at the young people.

"I'm Miss Ralston," Wendy said, stepping forward.

"So young? Are you the proprietor of Edgewater Inn?"

"That's right," Wendy replied with one of her most engaging smiles. "Are you Mr. Schmidt? We hadn't expected you so soon."

The man shrugged. "I wired for the reservation tomorrow, but Max came fast. We can be accommodated?"

"Of course. If you'll drive on up to the porch—"

The man stepped into the car. The straight-backed chauffeur closed the door respectfully,

and the powerful car rolled toward the entrance of the Inn.

"Gosh, Wendy, I don't like him. He looks bossy, and kind of oily," Eva murmured.

Wendy gave her a despairing glance. "I only hope *he* likes us," she whispered in reply.

Duke clambered down from the ladder he'd been using to hang the sign. "Gosh, Wendy, we forgot about bell-hops! Pete and I will go carry their luggage."

Wendy giggled as she raced with the others across the lawn. "At least, the hotel register is ready!"

Inwardly trembling, she stood behind the small desk in the little reception lobby and greeted the others of the party.

Mrs. Schmidt was oddly like her husband, rotund and red of face. But she was sugary and fluttery, exclaiming over the view and the loveliness of the sunset. Her son, a stolid-faced boy of twelve or thirteen, stood awkwardly by the huge heap of trunks and bags.

"You register for us, Hugo," Mr. Schmidt said authoritatively.

The tutor, Hugo Krueger, wrote in the big old ledger with a fine, precise hand. It was easy to read upside-down, Wendy discovered. The son's name was Kurt. The chauffeur was Max Meyer.

"We have prepared the south wing for you," Wendy said easily with a poise which covered her nervousness. "You may have your choice of rooms elsewhere, however, since it is so early in the season."

She led the way to the airy south wing.

"We do like privacy," Mrs. Schmidt replied. "The wing sounds charming. Perhaps, it will be just like our own little nest. Are your sunsets always so—so spectacular?"

Wendy nodded and opened the door to the largest of the four rooms. It was a sunny chamber with four large windows overlooking the lake and a slope of wooded hill. Eva had suggested the soft turquoise shade for the walls and the French gray for the furniture, and her color scheme had been successful. "But this is delightful!" Mrs. Schmidt exclaimed. "I should like this one for mine, and we can use it for the sitting room of the suite!"

Mrs. Schmidt was effusive in her praise of all four of the rooms, but Mr. Schmidt reserved comment. He took the other outside room. The tutor and the boy were assigned the ones across the corridor, facing the court. The chauffeur's room was a smaller one on the second floor of the same wing.

It took more than an hour to get the Schmidts

comfortably established, however. Duke and Pete had to assist with shifting the stacks of luggage several times. Wendy was asked to bring more towels and blankets. Eva and the others, weary from their two weeks of intense work in preparing the Inn, finally gave up and went home.

Wendy, as was her nightly custom, went to see her uncle for a few minutes before retiring in her own little room in the opposite wing.

"I'm afraid we're going to earn our money this summer," she confessed. "Our first guests are the fussy type."

Uncle Ed nodded sympathetically. "You and your friends have been humdingers at getting the place ready, Wendy. I would never have believed it. And you still have more than half the loan in reserve. Run along to bed, now, and get a good night's rest. Maybe they won't seem so demanding tomorrow. Remember, they've just had a long, hard drive."

"Don't worry, Uncle Ed. I'm not complaining. I asked for this hard work. If only they like it here! Mr. Schmidt didn't say a word—and Mrs. Schmidt was so overly-pleased that I don't think she was very sincere."

It was a long time before Wendy went to sleep, in spite of her weariness. And when she finally dropped off, it was to troubled dreams of a gro-

tesque Mr. Schmidt painting terrifying black designs all over the fresh walls of the Inn, and ripping the new sheets into useless shreds.

Wendy rose early the next morning and raced down to the dock for a quick dip. Then she dressed in a crisp white uniform, and tied her honey-colored curls back with a white ribbon.

Sarah was already in the kitchen. She had baked fresh cinnamon rolls and coffee was bubbling on the electric range.

"That driver gets up early," she told Wendy. "He's already had his breakfast and he's out in back, monkeyin' with that big car."

Wendy glanced with approval around the airy dining room as she set four places at one of the tables near a window. She placed a bowl of tulips in the center of the table, and arranged a pair of bouquets for the lovely silver vases of her mother's which graced the old mahogany lowboy.

The Schmidts came to breakfast about nine o'clock. Kurt straggled in later, followed by the tutor.

Everything went wrong. Mrs. Schmidt said with some surprise, "My dear, do you do *everything*? You're the hostess and proprietor and now the waitress!"

Wendy flushed, managed a smile, and said, "Yes. It's still so early in the season that we don't

need a large staff. Would you like orange juice, tomato juice or grapefruit? And we have fresh strawberries for the cereal."

They gave their orders; each different. The stolid boy said nothing, the whole time, except to ask for the one brand of packaged cereal which Wendy had forgotten to stock. Mrs. Schmidt decided that the eggs were just a bit too hard, and Sarah had to cook more. Mr. Schmidt had taken his poached; the tutor, scrambled; Kurt, fried; and Mrs. Schmidt, boiled—twice! And there was no pleasant word of praise for Sarah's famous cinnamon rolls.

Shortly after breakfast the big grey bus stopped at the door, and a thin, neatly-dressed woman alighted. It was Miss Abbott. Wendy was delighted to see her.

"We've only one set of guests so far," she explained as she led the newcomer to her room on the second floor. "But the menu planning is already a problem for me."

"Since you have just the one family, why couldn't I submit a number of menus to them for their choice? That way, we could probably please them." Miss Abbott had a gentle, low voice.

Wendy grinned. "That sounds sensible. My word, but you've *no* idea how glad I am to see you!"

"Perhaps I do," Miss Abbott told her, understandingly. "I can remember my own first nursing case only too vividly. I was just out of training when I enlisted in the Red Cross during the World War. My first job was in a French hospital in a crowded ward. I couldn't understand a word—there were German prisoners, too—and it was terrific for the first hour or two. Then an older nurse came along. She'd been there several months. I'll never forget her interpreting for me while she efficiently went about her own duties."

Wendy's eyes were sparkling. "What a wonderful experience that must have been for you!"

"It was. I shouldn't have missed it for anything," the soft-voiced nurse replied. "But it impaired my health. I can't work twenty-four hours a day, now, I assure you! And that is the reason I remembered Edgewater Inn's peace and quiet so longingly, when the doctors told me to take it easy for several months. Do take care of your health, Wendy! Don't work too hard, just because you're young and ambitious!"

"When you've changed, come on down and meet Uncle Ed and Sarah," Wendy told her. "Uncle Ed is my guardian and he's a darling. Sarah has been the housekeeper here for years."

Miss Abbott chuckled. "Oh, I think I remem-

ber her! Has she mellowed any, with the passing of time?"

"You'll have to decide that for yourself," Wendy replied, suddenly serious.

CHAPTER III

ADDED STAFF

WHEN WENDY went back to the kitchen, Sarah snapped, "Where have you been? The Schmidts have been lookin' all over for you. She acted peeved."

Wendy gasped and hurried along the hall to the south wing. She knocked on Mrs. Schmidt's door.

The unsmiling woman greeted her with a curt, "Oh, so you finally got here. Isn't it customary for the rooms to be made up while we're at breakfast? I was quite shocked to come back and find that the beds hadn't been made."

"I'm sorry," Wendy apologized, setting to work at once. "I shall try to find a chambermaid today. Miss Abbott, who is to serve as dietitian for the season, has just arrived and I've been with her."

"I shall take my knitting to the veranda until you've finished," Mrs. Schmidt told her coldly. "You may let me know when the room is fit."

Wendy was furious at the woman's discourte-

ous words, and she took her anger out in swift work. In less than half an hour the four rooms were restored to apple-pie order.

Miss Abbott was waiting at the desk in the small reception lobby. "I talked with Mrs. Schmidt about the menus," she said. "I had made up several samples before I came. Why is she so annoyed? She's out on the veranda thrusting her needles in and out of the wool as if she were jabbing her worst enemy."

Wendy's forehead was wrinkled in an unaccustomed little frown of worry. "We're so short-handed and unorganized as yet," she explained, "that the rooms weren't made up this morning as soon as she would have liked. Excuse me, please, and I'll go tell her I've finished, then we'll see Sarah."

A moment later she came back, all smiles. "Mrs. Schmidt is in a fine mood now. She told me she approved heartily of your menu suggestions. All seemed to be forgiven."

"Good!" Miss Abbott gave the girl a warm smile. "Now, on to our next dragon!"

Unfortunately Sarah appeared in the doorway at that precise moment, looking her grimmest. "If you was lookin' for me, I'm right here," she said.

"Oh, Sarah," Wendy announced, with an ease

she didn't feel, "this is Miss Abbott. Remember her? She was here before—before Mother and Daddy died."

"Yes, I remember her." Sarah's tone was noncommittal. "There's a woman—says her name's Jennie Boggs—out in the kitchen. Wants to see you."

"All right." Wendy was delighted with an excuse to escape. "You stay here, Sarah, with Miss Abbott, and I'll be right back. Miss Abbott's already talked with Mrs. Schmidt, and found out what they like."

In the kitchen Wendy found a large, unattractive woman, with straight graying hair and ill-fitting clothes.

"I'm Jennie Boggs," the stranger announced. "I thought you might be needin' extra help here, so I'm askin' for work."

"The first lucky break of the morning!" Wendy thought. In her relief, she overlooked the woman's surly manners. And she forgot to ask for references.

"We are short-handed," Wendy agreed. "We need a chambermaid, and someone to assist with preparing the vegetables and washing the dishes."

"I could do that," the woman said, almost scornfully.

"Well, that's fine," Wendy declared. "What —what salary would you expect?"

"Room and board and twelve dollars a week."

"Well—that's more than I'd planned to pay," Wendy said, regretfully. "Perhaps I'd better advertise—"

"Would you pay ten?" the woman said hastily.

"We could try that," Wendy agreed, "and if our business picks up a lot and your work is satisfactory, I should be glad to raise your pay later in the season."

"Where's my room?"

"In this wing on the second floor. I'll take you there. Sarah can give you your lunch early, and then you can help with the dishes."

"Haven't you any rooms on the other side?" Jennie Boggs demanded.

Wendy stared at the woman in astonishment. "Yes. Why?"

"I kind of like to be on the south. Always feel more comfortable," the woman whined.

"It's a smaller room and it hasn't been redecorated," Wendy explained, still looking at the woman in a puzzled manner. "And it's on the third floor. We didn't fix it up this time because we thought it might be hot in the middle of the season."

"Oh, that's all right," Jennie declared. "I sure would appreciate it if you'd put me on that side."

Still a little puzzled, Wendy led the way across the court to the south wing.

"You can use this outside stairway, except in bad weather, to go from your room to the kitchen. Right now most of your maid work and cleaning will be in this wing. We'll continue—that is, Sarah, Uncle Ed and I—to take care of our own quarters in the north wing."

Jennie's room was a small, cramped one with a single dormer window.

"When Edgewater Inn was open every season, this was used for storing trunks," Wendy explained. "The wall paper is rather faded. You'll find curtains and bedding for the cot in the linen closet on the second floor. You'd better clean your room and get it ready and unpack before lunch. Report to Sarah in the kitchen when you've finished."

She turned to leave, but came back after she'd gone halfway down the stairway. "Are you sure you wouldn't even want to see the other rooms? One that is already cleaned and ready?"

Jennie shook her head. "This'll do," she said shortly.

Wendy raced across the court to the door to the center reception room. She'd been away from

Sarah and Miss Abbott longer than she'd planned. Even as she hurried, though, she noticed with quick pleasure the neat croquet green and the newly-painted shuffleboard court that Pete and Duke had worked so hard on. The flowerbeds were gay and colorful.

Miss Abbott was alone. "Sarah and I have finished our first conference," she reported, with a wry smile. "I wish someone had told her a long time ago about sugar catching more flies than vinegar."

"She'd just say 'Who wants flies?' " Wendy said, chuckling. "Did you reach a compromise?"

"After a fashion." The slender woman gave Wendy a look of compassion. "Don't worry about us, my dear. Sarah and I will have our battles, but I'll do my best to see that you're not annoyed unless it's something important. Something tells me that you are going to need your strength, patience and intelligence elsewhere. And that it's going to be a busy summer."

"Thank you." Wendy patted her new friend's thin shoulder. "You're a peach."

Sarah appeared at the entrance to the dining room in time to hear Wendy's last remark. She sniffed audibly and said, "Food's ready. Want to tell the Schmidts?"

"Heavens! I forgot to set the table!"

"I did it." Sarah stalked back to the kitchen.

Wendy walked down the corridor to the south wing. As a child, when Edgewater Inn was filled with guests, she had been allowed to ring a bell up and down the halls to summon the guests to meals. But she had decided not to revive that particular old custom until there were more to be called.

As she approached Mrs. Schmidt's door, she could hear women's voices raised in excitement.

Now what was the matter? Wendy's body tensed.

Listening, she realized they were speaking in a foreign tongue! And who was with Mrs. Schmidt?

Wendy heard a noise at the end of the corridor. Not wishing to appear an eavesdropper, she knocked on the door. There was a sudden silence in the room before Mrs. Schmidt demanded, in English, "Who's there?"

"It's Wendy Ralston, Mrs. Schmidt. I came to tell you lunch is ready."

"Open the door, Jennie." Mrs. Schmidt's voice was suddenly sugary. "My dear, we've just discovered the strangest thing!"

Jennie Boggs, almost neat-looking now in a gray-and-white cotton uniform, had opened the door. Wendy stared at her in astonishment,

while Mrs. Schmidt's too-sweet tones went on. "Your new maid, here, and I are both Czechs! Isn't that thrilling? Our parents even came from the same part of Bohemia and we talk almost the same dialect!"

"Yes." Wendy paused, studying the expressionless countenance of the new servant. "It is strange. Could you tell me where Mr. Schmidt and Mr. Krueger and your son are? I should like to tell them, too, that lunch is ready."

"Kurt and Mr. Krueger are busy with lessons, and I think Mr. Schmidt is reading. But never mind, my dear. I'll tell them. We'll be in the dining room in less than five minutes. It was sweet of you to come and call us."

"Thank you." Wendy continued to look at Jennie Boggs. "Since you've changed, you may have your lunch now," she told her. "Then you'll be all ready to help Sarah with the dishes."

Wendy's lovely face mirrored her troubled thoughts as she turned and strode back along the corridor. She couldn't lose the frightening shock of hearing those excited foreign tongues in Edgewater Inn. Where had Jennie Boggs really come from? How had she happened to apply for a job at the very moment when Wendy was desperate for help?

CHAPTER IV

MORE GUESTS

WENDY HAD little opportunity the rest of that day to worry about Jennie Boggs and the Schmidts.

Before lunch was over a modest roadster with California license plates stopped in the drive.

The newcomers were named Mr. and Mrs. Harry Alexander and were from Los Angeles.

"We should like an inexpensive quiet room," the man told her. "Preferably with a southern exposure."

Wendy smiled. "Everyone likes the south wing, it seems. I'll show you what we have."

She led the way up the center stairs and along the corridor of the second floor. The couple looked at all the rooms available, and chose the smallest and least expensive. It had one window facing the court.

"I'm a music composer," the rabbity little man explained, "and I want a quiet room where I can study and concentrate."

"Mr. Krueger, the guest below, is the tutor

with the Schmidt party," Wendy replied. "I don't believe he will disturb you." She smiled. "I trust you don't compose early in the morning on an open horn, do you? That would arouse everybody on the court!"

Mrs. Alexander, a lovely, dark-eyed woman, smiled in quick response, but her husband was almost stern in his answer. "I shall not annoy your other guests, Miss Ralston."

"Would you like lunch? Perhaps you'd like to freshen up a bit, after your drive."

"We've eaten," Mr. Alexander said shortly.

Wendy withdrew, feeling rebuffed. "He's going to be tough," she told herself, "for all his weak, rabbity face. His wife is sweet. I hope she enjoys her vacation here."

Still more guests were waiting when Wendy returned to the lobby.

Wendy could scarcely conceal her joy. "If business keeps up like this all summer we'll be rolling in money," she exulted as she watched the two strangers registering.

The newcomers looked little like tourists Wendy had seen at the other resort hotels along the shore. Instead of hunting or fishing clothes, the men were dressed in worn business suits. Both were middle-aged and thickly built. One signed "W. Lindsley"; the other, "B. E. Thomp-

son." They were from Brooklyn, New York.

Lindsley said, "We want to see several of your less expensive rooms and we'd like the weekly rates. We may stay for some time, if everything is satisfactory."

"It's early in the season, but our guests seem to be coming rapidly," Wendy told them. "There are still six or eight of our less expensive rooms available on the second floor."

The men looked at all the rooms, reserving comment. Wendy chattered on, pointing out the views from the various windows. She had started in the north wing. After they had examined several without saying a word, Wendy finally asked: "Haven't you seen any you like?"

"Yes," Lindsley told her, "but we want to see all of them."

Wendy showed him the others.

"They're going to choose one in the south wing, too!" she told herself. She pointed out the room just chosen by the Alexanders and said, "This is taken—"

"We'll take this one," Lindsley said abruptly, indicating the one next door.

"Thank you. It's a little late, but would you like some lunch?"

"No."

Wendy left, again feeling strangely rebuffed.

"There must be something wrong in my manner," she worried. "Perhaps I'm too friendly. Too glad to see them."

She shrugged her shoulders and told herself sensibly that the fault wasn't all hers. The Alexanders, Lindsley and Thompson were just an odd lot of tourists, that was all. She realized that Thompson hadn't spoken once. Lindsley hadn't even asked him if he liked the final decision on the room.

This time the reception lobby was empty. Wendy went to find Sarah and tell her the good news. And then she wanted to run up the hill and report to her uncle.

"We're going to have four more for dinner," she sang out gaily, throwing her arm around Sarah's stiff shoulders. She gave the stern-faced woman a quick hug, and said, "Isn't that swell? We're going to be millionaire hotel-keepers yet!"

"We'll need more help," Sarah warned. She continued putting dishes away. "Why don't you get your friends to work? Duke isn't doing anything this summer, and neither is Miss Eva. You could afford to give them a little salary, if this keeps up."

"Why, Sarah! What a perfectly swell idea! I'll call both of them, this minute."

She raced off to telephone from the lobby.

Miss Abbott was at the desk, working on a marketing list, and Wendy delightedly told her the news.

Wendy called Eva first. "You mean—you want me to work at Edgewater Inn?" her friend demanded. "What in the world could I do?"

"Wait on tables—and maybe watch the desk. Things like that. We'll keep you busy."

"Wendy, I'd love it! I was just preparing to die on the vine because I knew I'd probably never get to see you the whole blessed summer."

"Elegant! Hurry over and try on one of my new uniforms. Thanks, Eva!"

Duke was equally pleased, and promised to come as soon as he'd finished mowing the lawn at home.

While Wendy was still talking with Duke, the newest arrivals came down, went through the lobby and got in their old sedan.

Miss Abbott stared after the two men, a thoughtful frown of concentration on her face.

When Wendy finished her conversation with Duke, she explained to the older woman, "The first man was Mr. Lindsley, and the other is Mr. Thompson. Mr. Lindsley seems to be boss—he chose the room and did all the talking. They're both from Brooklyn, N. Y. That's funny, isn't

it? Our other newcomers are from Los Angeles. Opposite ends of the country."

"What did you say the first man's name is?"

"Lindsley." Wendy glanced at the register again. "Just an initial—W. Probably William."

Miss Abbott's voice was troubled. "He looks very much like someone I used to know a long time ago. But the mustache isn't familiar—and I never heard that name before, I'm sure. Usually, I'm pretty good at placing names and faces. I've prided myself on it, so it's extremely annoying to be so completely baffled."

CHAPTER V

TOO MUCH SALT

EVEN BEFORE Wendy had the opportunity to tell her uncle about the new guests, still more arrived.

This time, the tourists were from Canada. They were an attractive, lively brother and sister, named Bob and Mary Patton. They chose two front rooms upstairs, just around the corner from the south wing.

Wendy returned to the lobby to find a grinning Duke, gloating over the register. "Eleven guests, young lady!" he said in greeting. "That's a very lucky number. And the horoscope last night in the paper said today was auspicious for new business ventures. Isn't it swell."

"I think it's almost too good to last," Wendy confessed. "Do you know I've been so busy that I haven't had a chance to run up the hill and tell Uncle Ed how well we're doing?"

"You really should," Duke told her. "He has been so worried."

"So have I. But even in the old days, I don't

think Edgewater Inn ever filled up this fast so early in the season."

Eva, dressed in one of Wendy's white uniforms, appeared in the dining-room door.

"When did you get here?" Wendy asked.

"While you were upstairs. Sarah told me where your uniforms were, and I helped myself. And Miss Abbott has been showing me how to set the tables. Gee, she's a peach, Wendy!"

Wendy nodded and whispered, "I wish the *paying* guests were all half so nice."

"Your troubles are over," Duke assured her loftily. "They've all been handicapped by a poor first impression. You see, you haven't previously had Windsor's wafting and wangling service as a part of the official greeting. Hereafter, when guests arrive at Edgewater Inn, their luggage will be wafted and their tips will be wangled by Windsor. Whoops!"

Wendy and Eva giggled. Then Wendy pointed down the drive. "Here's your first chance, Duke!"

A large sedan was coming up the drive.

Duke bustled out.

This was a family party, touring north for a vacation and wanting two rooms for the night. The father and mother were nice-looking, Wendy decided, and the two husky boys were lively and

full of fun. They liked the first two rooms they were shown. Duke managed the numerous bags with ease. Wendy was relieved to have his help. Another family party was waiting to register!

Eva watched with eager interest from the dining-room door.

"I'll be glad to take over the desk," she murmured to Wendy. "I think you'd better slip out to the kitchen and warn Sarah about the onslaught or she won't have half enough dinner to go around."

Wendy was startled, on reaching the kitchen, to see a large, unattractive woman sitting in one of the straight-backed chairs.

She started to say, "Jennie, why aren't you—" when she realized that Jennie was sitting on a high stool at the sink, peeling potatoes.

"That's my sister, Mamie," Jennie said. "When I saw all those folks comin', I gave her a ring on the telephone and told her to come over. You might be needin' more help."

"I guess I do," Wendy said slowly. "Sarah will need someone all the time in the kitchen, if this keeps up. And it will keep you busy, making beds and cleaning."

Mamie Boggs was older, and slightly smaller than her sister, Wendy realized now. But she had the same sullen, silent manner.

"I'd like the same wages you're payin' Jen," she said, "and I'll bunk in the same room."

"Yes," Wendy agreed. "We can try it for a week, at least. Both of you can help in the kitchen this afternoon, since all the bedroom work is done. Tomorrow Jennie can start taking care of that, and you can help Sarah here."

"Did you eat any lunch?" Sarah demanded.

"Why—no, I didn't," Wendy said. "I forgot all about it."

"That's what I thought. I fixed a couple of sandwiches and a glass of milk for you. Can't afford to have you sick and down in bed when we're so busy."

"But I want to run up and tell Uncle Ed all the exciting news."

"Take 'em with you. I made some of them date cookies this morning and you can take a handful along for him."

Wendy's eyes twinkled. "I still don't see how anyone can talk so tough and be so kind."

"Get along with you." And Sarah stalked off to the dining room with a stack of clean dishes.

Wendy balanced the plate, neatly covered with a napkin, as she hurried along the wide path to her uncle's workshop in the woods. The trail was gentle and winding, so that the pull wouldn't be too difficult for the cripple's wheel-chair.

The door to the cabin was open. Gentle May sunshine filled the room. Wendy had been fascinated with Uncle Ed's workshop since she was a small girl. The shelves were lined with models of famous lake freighters and passenger boats; exact replicas of old-fashioned full-rigged schooners; a few new trim battleships and streamlined destroyers. He sat facing a wide picture window which gave a glimpse of fir, birch and mountain ash, and his beloved Lake Lester far below.

"Uncle Ed, do I have good news!" Wendy called.

"I've been hearing the cars," he responded. "I was in hopes you'd have time to slip away and tell me about it."

"Well, we have so much new business, I had to hire Duke and Eva and Jennie Boggs' sister, Mamie!"

The man whistled. "Is the Inn clear full?"

"Just about." Wendy settled on her favorite bench and whisked the napkin off the plate. "Want part of a sandwich?"

"Don't mind if I do."

Wendy described all the new guests, told where they were from and which rooms they'd chosen.

"It's a tremendous load off my mind," Uncle Ed said finally. "I hadn't wanted to worry you too much, but the bank's terms are pretty hard."

"What are they?" Wendy asked. "After all, I got us into this business, and there's no point in trying to spare me any of the worry."

"Well, it seems as if I had been wrong," the older man confessed. "Must be a lot more tourists these days than there were ten years ago."

"Wait until the fame of Sarah's cooking spreads," Wendy answered, nibbling contentedly at one of the date cookies. "We'll be turning them away."

"I hope so. Because if we don't repay that loan by the first of September, we lose the hotel."

"*Uncle Ed!* Is it really as bad as that?"

He nodded. "But with a crowd like this on the first day you're open, there's nothing to worry about."

Wendy was sobered. "Yes. If nothing goes wrong—"

The young hotel manager didn't have long to wait before her new fears were realized.

Dinner that night at Edgewater Inn was a nightmare.

The soup was too salty to eat.

Hastily, Wendy substituted the canned grapefruit juice that had been placed in the refrigerator to chill for breakfast. But it was a bad beginning for the meal, and most of the diners had tasted the vile stuff before they could be stopped. Be-

sides, it made double work for Eva and Wendy in waiting on the tables, although Miss Abbott considerately helped them.

But that wasn't all!

The scalloped potatoes with the ham were too salty to be eaten. And there was nothing to be substituted at the last moment.

The two family parties that had registered in the afternoon, checked out and went to another resort hotel further north along the shore.

Wendy was on the verge of tears. But after dessert was served she went to the desk in the lobby, and apologized to each of the guests as they left the dining room.

The Schmidts were the last to leave.

Wendy was panicky! *What if they should decide to leave?*

Mr. Schmidt paused at the desk after the rest of his group had gone on.

"I can't imagine how it happened," Wendy told him. "Of course, we have new help in the kitchen. Sarah's cooking is always perfectly flavored."

"Perhaps it won't happen again," Mr. Schmidt said, his voice oily and pompous. "I regretted seeing those two family parties leave."

"Yes. It was too bad."

"I trust you won't lose any of the others," he

went on. "It's just a suggestion—of course, you realize that I'm not speaking for myself. But it might be a good idea to tell the remaining guests that you will deduct a day's charges for meals from their total bills. They might feel more—er—generous about overlooking any other small discomforts that may appear because of your youth and inexperience."

Wendy was completely flattened by the implied criticism, and the cost of an entire day's expenses and profits would be a serious handicap. However, she realized that his suggestion would work.

"Thank you, Mr. Schmidt," she managed to say. "I'll do it. And of course, I shall do the same for you and your party."

Mr. Schmidt produced a gilt-wrapped cigar, dropped the gay wrapping on the floor and bowed mockingly. "Thank you, Miss Ralston; you're a sensible girl."

He sauntered out to the veranda where most of the Edgewater Inn's guests had gathered to admire the sunset.

Wendy was still sitting at the desk, a moment later, her head in her hands and her whole body sagging dejectedly, when Duke came in from the court.

"Eva just told me how dinner went wrong," he

said. "Gee, that's tough luck. I just can't understand it. I, personally, never saw a day so filled with good-luck signs. Even the horoscope in the paper—"

"A ruined dinner isn't all," Wendy told him, ruefully. "I've just been blackmailed, for the first time in my life. Mr. Schmidt hinted that everyone would feel better about staying if I didn't charge for a whole day's meals! And I can't afford to refuse. He might take his family somewhere else tomorrow."

"I still don't see how it could have happened," Duke muttered. "Somebody did something unlucky, I'll bet. Like spilling salt and not throwing a pinch of it over their left shoulder."

Wendy laughed in genuine amusement. "Oh, Duke! How funny! Of course, someone spilled the salt! Only they couldn't throw a pinch of it over their shoulder, because all that didn't hit the soup went right into the potatoes!"

CHAPTER VI

A QUARREL

THE SHRILL cry of her alarm clock woke Wendy early the next morning after a troubled sleep that left her still exhausted. She'd been awake half the night, staring into the darkness. For the first time she'd begun to realize the seriousness of the risk in her hotel venture. A number of minor mishaps—like too much salt in the soup—might eventually lead to the loss of Edgewater Inn!

After her customary quick dip in the lake, she felt a little cheered.

"We may go down," she told herself, her determined little chin set obstinately, "but we'll go down fighting."

When she neared the kitchen, fresh and attractive in one of the new white uniforms, she could hear Sarah's voice raised in anger. "How do I know but what you did it yourself when my back was turned? You can ask Miss Wendy or her uncle—I never put too much salt in anything in my life!"

"I'm only saying," came the well-modulated

tones of Miss Abbott, "that we must be careful to prevent anything of the sort happening again."

Wendy stood at the door, staring at the two angry women. Did she imagine it, or was that actually a smile of triumph on Mamie Boggs' colorless lips? She turned away quickly when she caught a glimpse of Wendy so the girl couldn't be sure.

"I'm not blaming *either* of you," Wendy said with quick significance. "So why should you two blame each other?"

"If you mean it was me or Jennie, you're crazy," the newest member of the staff denied. "We wasn't near the old salt."

"Sarah's right." Wendy's voice was steady. "She has never put too much seasoning in anything. And I'm positive it couldn't happen twice in a meal—accidentally. If it happens again, I shall ask you to leave."

This time Mamie Boggs didn't answer. But her manner was insolent as she deliberately turned her back to the girl.

"I didn't mean to interfere in the kitchen arrangements," Miss Abbott told Wendy. "I simply wanted to point out how seriously a ruined meal, this early in the season, could affect our business. Both the families who left last night will spread the story. They can't do much harm,

but if it were to happen several times, our dining-room will become famous—but in a way that we won't like."

"Sarah just misunderstood." Wendy threw her arm around the thin housekeeper and gave her a quick hug. "She's got eyes in the back of her head, and she won't miss much that goes on. I know—I've tried to get away with cookies for years!"

Sarah snapped the switch of the burner under the coffee-maker and gave a quick look at the rolls in the oven. "Don't worry about the kitchen, Wendy. It won't happen again."

Wendy winked at Miss Abbott, grinned, and went into the dining room for a quick inspection. Eva had set the tables for breakfast the evening before, and Miss Abbott had arranged fresh bowls of flowers as centerpieces. The Alexanders were just coming in the door.

For the next hour and a half the dining room was a busy spot. The Schmidts were the last to come. They had just been served their final cups of coffee when Duke appeared in the door and beckoned to Wendy.

"I think they're honeymooners," he whispered out of the corner of his mouth. "They sure act goofy."

Wendy greeted the strangers cordially and

watched the beaming young man sign the register.

"Dr. and Mrs. Jerry McNeill, Iowa City, Iowa," she read.

They chose the north corner room on the second floor.

The pretty bride called softly, "Oh, darling! What a lovely view of the lake! And such a sweet little Island!"

"Would you like to picnic over there this noon?" Wendy asked. "Duke, you could run them over in your motor boat, couldn't you?"

"Sure."

"That would be swell!" The young doctor was pleased.

"There's a grand beach for swimming on this side of the Island," Wendy told them. "I'll have Sarah pack some sandwiches and fruit for you—or would you rather take steaks to cook over a fire?"

"The steaks, by all means."

"When would you like the boat, sir?" Duke sounded very professional.

"In about five minutes. Thanks."

It was a busy day but it went smoothly.

Just before dinner a noisy, gay quartet of girls, vacationing from a large office in Chicago, arrived. Their old sedan was loaded down with

piles of luggage. They had brought tennis rackets and golf bags, a banjo, an accordion, and an excited little wire-haired puppy. They took two of the larger rooms on the first floor, and the whole hotel resounded with their laughter and excitement.

Wendy hummed happily as she went about her work. The first of September seemed ages away and no longer threatening.

After one of Sarah's finest dinners, perfectly seasoned, most of the guests sat on the porch to admire the sunset.

One of the new girls called to Duke. "What do the natives do for fun around this village? Do you ever have any dances?"

"Sure." Duke grinned easily. "We have swell mixers every other week at the high school gym during the school year."

He was on the verge of telling her that several of the larger hotels up the shore had dances every weekend during the summer season. Just in time, he caught Wendy's warning glance.

"Duke, may I speak to you a moment?"

Wendy led the way through the reception room to the court which was deserted. "Gosh, Duke! We're going to have to plan some hotel parties."

"Why not?" Duke asked practically.

Eva, her dining-room duties completed, appeared at the door. "Is that a private conference, or may anyone sit in?"

"Come on. We need you," Wendy answered. "If we're going to get our share of the resort business, we're going to have to plan some hotel dances. Those girls who came this afternoon are wanting some excitement."

"I wouldn't mind a party myself," Eva said, smiling. "That's a pretty good floor in the dining room. We could push the tables back."

"This is Thursday. What about Saturday night?" Duke suggested.

"We'd have to get music, rally the gang and put up some signs in the stores in Cottey," Wendy planned.

"If you charged a dollar a couple," Duke added eagerly, "most of the high school kids could come. We could get the same three-piece orchestra we usually have for the gym mixers, and you might even have enough of a crowd to make a little money."

Wendy was delighted. "Oh, that would be marvelous! It's a chance to make up the salt loss."

"Let's go tell those girls before they decide to go somewhere else," Duke suggested.

"You and Eva can tell them, and then would

you see Pete and get him to make the placards advertising it? I've some work to do at the desk, and I'll have to telephone to find out about the orchestra."

The quartet of girls greeted Duke's announcement with joy, but Wendy noted with alarm that Mr. and Mrs. Schmidt soon stalked in from the porch and went to their rooms. One of the newcomers came in to get the banjo and accordion, and the fresh young voices were soon harmonizing all the current favorites, and a few of the old tunes which always crop up in moonlight singing—"Home on the Range," "Sweet Sue" and "Ida."

Harry Alexander, the music instructor from Los Angeles, also went to his room, but his lovely, sad-eyed wife remained in her dark corner, listening.

Lindsley and Thompson, the two men from Brooklyn, had gone somewhere in their car. And Wendy noted with some surprise that Bob and Mary Patton, the brother and sister from Canada, had joined them for the ride. The young doctor and his bride had gone for a stroll along the lake after dinner, but they joined the singers when they returned.

As soon as Wendy had finished her work at the desk she went to see her uncle. He was sitting near the window in his room enjoying the music.

"This is more pleasant than last night, isn't it?" he said softly in greeting.

Wendy told him of the plans for a party and he nodded approvingly. "It's been a long time since the Edgewater Inn has seen so much life," he murmured. "I hadn't realized before how dull it has been for you."

"Don't be silly!" Wendy chuckled. "I haven't had a dull moment."

"No," her uncle told her affectionately. "You take joy and life and gaiety along with you, wherever you go."

Before Saturday evening Duke and the loyal gang had sold forty tickets for the party at Edgewater Inn. Wendy was overjoyed at the success of the new venture.

Events were moving without mishap for the hotel, too. There had been no repetition of the ruined meals. Except for the four girls vacationing from Chicago, and the honeymooners, the news of the dance had been greeted coolly, however. Saturday evening, when Wendy placed complimentary tickets for the party at each plate in the dining room, she still didn't know how many Edgewater Inn guests would be at the party.

Immediately after the last diner left, Pete Shipton, Marie Benson, Arline Jackson, Eva, Duke

and Wendy whipped into their work. In less than the allotted two hours the dining room had been transformed into a charming ballroom. Even Sarah had unbent and entered into the gay preparations. She'd made gallons of her delectable grape punch, and produced a handsome cut-glass bowl that Wendy had never seen before.

A snowy linen cloth covered a table at the end of the room opposite the orchestra platform, and candles flickered in silver candelabra flanking the bowl. Several easy chairs were near for the guests who wished to watch the dancing. Only the side-lights were turned on, and they were dimmed by the branches of greenery Duke and the other boys had used in decorating.

The music started at nine.

Some of the dancers from Cottey had arrived and were waiting on the wide verandah.

Wendy and Eva had slipped away earlier to dress. Wendy's frock was a pale blue crisp pique; Eva's was white organdie, full-skirted and ruffled.

Duke had wisely arranged that several single admission tickets were sold to his friends. It assured the four girls from Chicago an interesting succession of dancing partners.

Wendy was busy at the desk for a half hour after the music started, selling still more tickets. Out of the corner of her eye she noticed that the

hotel guests were coming, after all. She was gratified and relieved.

Mrs. Schmidt, in fact, had done herself proud. She was wearing an elaborate white satin gown. Her hair was massed high in an amazing array of tiny curls, held in place with jewelled pins. She toyed with a long strand of pearls as she spoke graciously to Wendy. Mr. Schmidt, in tails, looked like an overweight penguin.

The Alexanders came, but they hadn't dressed for evening. Mrs. Alexander was smiling and shy, yet unable to conceal her embarrassment at her short frock. "I'm so sorry I didn't bring any party dresses," she murmured to Eva at the door. "I hadn't realized there would be any need for them up here in the woods."

Eva reassured her quickly. "Lots of the Cottey girls are dancing in short summer frocks. You can be pretty sure that any of us natives in long dresses are seniors, and we're delighted at a chance to wear our class-party clothes again!"

Hugo Krueger, the Schmidt boy's tutor, approached Wendy when the crowd at the door had thinned. He was tall and erect in his evening clothes, and he bowed smartly, clicking his heels.

"May I have the pleasure of the next waltz?" he said, smiling. "That is, when you are free from your duties."

"Certainly." Wendy, dimpling, couldn't hide her glee. "Isn't it marvelous? We have more than eighty couples! Duke and I decided that we'd have to have parties every Saturday night, if the crowds keep coming."

"Fine!"

A new dance was starting. Hugo Krueger, his eyes twinkling, said, "It's a waltz!"

Wendy placed the money box and the unused tickets in the drawer of the desk and locked it. She slipped the key into the small blue beaded bag at her wrist.

"The music is much better than I'd expected," the young man confessed. "They are accomplished musicians."

Wendy nodded. "All three of them were soloists with our high school orchestra, and they've been playing together for our mixers for a couple of years."

Hugo Krueger was a graceful dancer, gliding over the small floor and avoiding the other couples deftly. His style was oddly different from the dancing in Cottey, but Wendy found it easy to follow.

"Even the boss and his wife are tripping a few steps. The music *must* be irresistible," he murmured to Wendy.

The Schmidts were dancing stiffly, unsmiling

and dignified. Wendy noted, too, that Mary Patton was dancing with Harry Alexander and talking eagerly. Bob Patton and Mrs. Alexander had taken easy chairs and were sipping punch. Miss Abbott had volunteered to preside at the bowl and was having a busy evening.

Lindsley and Thompson were the only guests at Edgewater Inn who had failed to appear at the party.

The waltz was finished, but Hugo Krueger was reluctant to have it end. He slipped a bill to the violinist with a request for the "Blue Danube."

There was an amused sparkle in his eyes as he turned back to Wendy. "Where are the light switches?" he demanded. "Let's have a moonlight dance!"

Wendy responded to the impish gleam in his eyes. "After the music starts, dance toward the kitchen door," she suggested. "The master switch is near the electric stove."

They slipped through the door unnoticed, and chuckled as they heard the concerted gasp and quick cries when Wendy flipped the switch out.

It wasn't really very dark in the dining room, for the moonlight streamed through the wide windows. Wendy smiled happily as she danced.

Her contented thoughts were interrupted rudely by a wild shriek, quite near.

"Ohhhh—turn on the lights! My pearls! Someone has stolen my pearls!!"

"Mrs. Schmidt!" Wendy cried. She jerked free of the tutor's arms and raced wildly for the kitchen, bumping into the startled dancers as she ran. The music faltered, and stopped.

It was only a few seconds but it seemed ages until she found the switch in the kitchen and snapped it back into place.

Hugo Krueger was waiting at the door for her, concern lining his thin face.

"The old lady's in a state," he whispered to Wendy, as she made her way, white-faced, to the center of the dance floor.

Everyone crowded around, excited and staring, as Mrs. Schmidt screamed hysterically, "I've been robbed! My lovely, lovely pearls—"

"Now, now, mamma," Mr. Schmidt was saying, attempting to soothe her. "They're just lost. We'll find them in a minute. Don't carry on so, mamma."

"Did you just miss them?" Wendy asked, quietly.

"No! I felt someone grab them while we were dancing!" The excited woman clutched aimlessly at her neck. "I demand that you search everyone here! Someone in this room has taken my pearls!"

CHAPTER VII

HIGH LINE

WENDY KEPT her voice soft and even, hiding the desperation and fright she felt.

"Of course, that' just what we'll do, Mrs. Schmidt. The pearls have to be here, right in this room."

Duke's voice called to her reassuringly. "No one's left the room—at least not by this door. I stood right here all the time the lights were out."

Wendy gave him a swift glance of gratitude and relief. He was standing in the exact center of the door to the lobby, his arms folded, his eyes alert.

"Miss Abbott, will you please go to the telephone and call Central? Tell her to send Joe Sullivan here immediately."

"Certainly, Wendy." The tall woman was moving toward the door.

"Joe Sullivan is the Cottey policeman," the girl explained to the Schmidts. "I'd rather he conducted the search."

The Schmidts exchanged alarmed glances, and

then the pompous man turned to the door. "Miss Abbott!" he called. "It won't be necessary to call the police, after all. Mamma, I just remembered that I took out insurance on your nice necklace before we started on this trip."

Mrs. Schmidt was all sunny smiles. "Why, papa! Isn't that lucky?" The look she turned on Wendy was dazzling with bright happiness. "Now, your pretty party isn't spoiled a bit! And the insurance company will get me new pearls."

"But, Mrs. Schmidt! If there has been a robbery, I want it settled here and now!" Wendy exclaimed indignantly.

"No! No! I won't hear of it," Mrs. Schmidt insisted. "Now, you young people go right ahead dancing. I'm a little upset, so I'll just go to my room."

"That's the way mamma wants it," Mr. Schmidt said sternly, his little eyes glaring at Wendy. "No more fuss about it. Just go ahead with the party." He took his wife's arm and they left.

Wendy, her heart sinking, watched them go.

"Better have the orchestra play something lively," Hugo Krueger murmured.

Wearily, Wendy forced herself to walk across to the small platform. She felt curious eyes watching; heard the ugly little whispers starting

all over the room. She was bitter against Mrs. Schmidt; just go ahead with the party, indeed! Why had she made such a tremendous scene about searching everyone, and then changed so abruptly? Surely the insurance company wouldn't simply hand her a new necklace, when no attempt had been made to recover it at the time it was stolen.

The music began. Several couples were dancing listlessly. As Wendy whirled again around the floor with Hugo Krueger, she realized sickeningly that he was the only guest at the hotel still dancing. The others had all drifted away. By the end of the dance the only ones remaining were the loyal members of Duke's and Wendy's own gang. Even Hugo Krueger murmured something about having to see how the old lady was getting on, and slipped away.

Wendy found Duke in the lobby. "I wanted to thank you for being wise and sticking to the door," she said, her face mirroring her miserable feelings.

"I'm afraid you made a mistake in not calling Sullivan anyway," Duke answered, soberly.

"But if you could have seen the nasty look Mr. Schmidt gave me!" Wendy gasped. "It was as if he dared me to go ahead!"

"I know—but there were more than a hundred

people here tonight. And they're going to gossip plenty. I'm afraid it will give the Edgewater Inn a pretty black reputation."

"It was probably a serious mistake," Wendy agreed quietly. "But I'm so anxious to keep the Schmidts here all season. If only I can keep them until the first of September."

Duke shrugged his shoulders. "We're both tired. Maybe it won't look so bad in the morning."

Wendy, dangerously close to tears, said good night to her loyal friends, and thanked them.

She paid off the musicians and blindly started to carry trays of punch glasses to the kitchen.

Miss Abbott stopped her.

"You're going to bed at once," she commanded. "I want you to take a couple of sleeping tablets. I left them in your room. I've already talked to Eva and Duke. We'll all get up at six in the morning and put the dining room in order. Right now you need rest badly."

Wendy was so down-hearted and exhausted that she followed the nurse's commands without question.

Although she had set her alarm for five-thirty, it was after eight when Wendy roused from her drugged sleep. She dressed frenziedly and hurried to the kitchen.

"Sarah! Why didn't you wake me up?"

"I turned your alarm off when I got up," the thin woman answered. "I figgered there's always plenty of time to hear bad news!"

"*Sarah! Did the Schmidts leave?*"

"No. But that nice young honey-moonin' couple did—before breakfast. Duke finally talked the four girls into eatin', before they checked out, but they're gone, too."

"But where did they eat?" Wendy asked, stupidly, still struggling against the effects of the sleeping tablets. She didn't seem to be able to think clearly. "The dining room was a mess—"

"Oh, we had that straightened up in plenty of time," Sarah answered. "The rest of 'em are still sleepin'. You'd better go back to your room and put a little make-up on your face. You look like a ghost in that white uniform."

Wendy was so upset that she failed to be startled by Sarah's actually suggesting that she use make-up.

"The rest of them will leave as soon as they've eaten," she surmised, bitterly. "Oh, Sarah! What have I got you and Uncle Ed, and Duke and Eva and me mixed up in?"

"You didn't take them pearls, did you?" Sarah slammed the oven door irritably. "If you ask me, they was probably from Woolworth's, anyways.

She just looks like a woman who likes to make a fuss over nothin'."

Wendy went to the refrigerator and got herself a tall glass of chilled grapefruit juice. The cold, tangy drink seemed to rouse her.

"Sarah, what if Mrs. Schmidt makes a fuss about those others leaving? She may say they took her jewels and made a getaway."

"Isn't that up to the insurance company?" Sarah demanded matter-of-factly. "She can't make troubles for us now. I understand there were plenty of witnesses when she and her fat husband told you not to get Joe Sullivan."

Wendy let out a great breath of relief. "That's right. Sarah, what would I ever do without you?"

"Your hair's a sight," Sarah told her, crossly. "Go on back to your room and get fixed up. You'll be needed in the dining room, very shortly."

Wendy chuckled and skipped up the back stairs two at a time.

Wendy was better prepared now to face the ordeal of serving breakfast to the Edgewater Inn guests.

To her utter amazement it was no ordeal.

The Schmidts greeted her more cordially than they had any morning since they'd arrived at Cottey, and there was no mention of the missing

pearls. Mrs. Schmidt beamed and smiled at everyone, and made a point of telling Wendy to let the cook know that the eggs were just exactly right.

No one else asked for his bill, preparatory to checking out.

Sunday dinner was a huge success, too, with Sarah's best fried chicken and luscious cherry pie.

Afterwards, Mr. Schmidt asked to speak with Wendy privately. "Oh! Oh!" Wendy thought. "This is where the axe falls—"

But she was wrong.

Mr. Schmidt was very gracious. "We're enjoying our stay at Edgewater Inn," he began.

"Even after last night?" Wendy blurted.

"We're not blaming you for that," he told her. "That—that worry we will turn over to the insurance company. I have a favor to ask, Miss Ralston. If we stay longer at Edgewater Inn, we shall need the high line from the electric light company run to our suite."

CHAPTER VIII

WENDY WONDERS

WENDY WAS silent a long moment, staring at the little plump man in stupefaction.

"The high line? From the kitchen?" she asked at last.

Mr. Schmidt nodded, puffing stolidly on his cigar.

Wendy suddenly giggled. "What in the world do you want with a high line? They're terribly expensive, you know. If you just want an electric plate for tea or coffee in your room, you can use the regular current for that."

"How expensive?"

Wendy considered. "It wouldn't cost as much as it did when we had the stove installed, because we already have the meter, and the line out to the highway. But it would cost at least fifty dollars." She thought swiftly. "I'll tell you, Mr. Schmidt, if you'll agree to stay until the first of September I'll do it."

But Mr. Schmidt was not to be tied down to such a promise. He hedged.

"I still can't see what in the world you want with a high line," Wendy said curiously. "Perhaps Sarah would let you use the one in the kitchen."

"No! No! You see, Miss Ralston, my son is very interested in electricity and electrical experiments. My wife and I like to encourage his aptitude, and Mr. Krueger feels that Kurt shows a great deal of promise along those lines. If we are to remain here all summer, I should like him to keep up his studies—you see?"

Wendy nodded. "Why don't I get an estimate on the work, tomorrow, and reserve my decision until I learn the cost?"

Mr. Schmidt sighed. "You are a sharper business woman than I thought, Miss Ralston. I give in. If you will make the arrangements, I will pay for the cost of installing it. I should like the line run to Kurt's room."

"I'll attend to it first thing in the morning."

"Wendy!" Duke cried, from the doorway of the inn. "Some new people are coming!"

"Excuse me, Mr. Schmidt," the girl said, politely. "I do appreciate Mrs. Schmidt's and your attitude about what happened last night—"

Mr. Schmidt waved his fat cigar in his fat hand. "Forget it, my dear."

The new guests were a middle-aged couple from Columbia, Kansas. When Wendy read the "Rev. and Mrs. Adam Ebermeyer" on the register, she remembered to be grateful that they hadn't arrived before the dance and the robbery.

Eva and Duke were waiting when Wendy returned to the reception lobby after getting the newcomers settled.

"Change to your jodhpurs. We're going for a ride," the boy announced in greeting.

"I can't leave, sillies!" Wendy objected.

"It's all set," Eva told her. "Miss Abbott's going to watch the desk and Sarah's going to have a cold buffet supper—and we're going riding."

"What's more, it's my treat," Duke told them. "The tips have been rolling in. Why, that doctor gave me a couple of bucks, just for taking him and his wife over to the Island and back in my old motor boat!"

Just the thought of a brisk canter along the bridle paths in Bluff Park brought the sparkle back to Wendy's eyes. "It won't take me a minute to change," she promised. "Gosh, what would I do without you two grand old goons?"

Less than an hour later, on their favorite mounts, the three friends were riding along the high trails above the lake. They trotted for sev-

eral minutes without talking, enjoying the exhilaration of the exercise and the magnificent views.

When the trail broadened, where they could ride three abreast, Duke slowed his roan mare to a walk.

"Say, Wendy, what did old man Schmidt want to see you about? Was he mad because the pearls might have been checked out with some of the guests who left this morning?"

"No," Wendy answered in a troubled voice. "He said it was now the worry of the insurance company. You'd never guess what he wanted!"

"Don't tease us," Eva urged.

"He wants me to run the electric high line to Kurt's room."

"Wendy! Whatever for?" Eva demanded.

"Do you mean he wants to electrocute young Stupid?" Duke added, grinning.

"Young Schmidt is very interested in electricity and electrical experiments," Wendy told them, "and Mr. Krueger doesn't want his fine research interrupted. So—if they stay all summer, they want a high line."

"Wendy, that Kurt wouldn't know an *ohm* if it walked up and shook hands with him. Why, I'll bet he isn't far enough in school to have read

about Bennie Franklin and the kite!" Duke's tone was scornful.

Wendy chuckled. "I think you're right, but Papa Schmidt thinks he has a young Einstein in his home. So—he's going to pay for the extension of the high line from the kitchen to Kurt's room."

Duke was thoughtful. "I'd give a dollar to know why Schmidt *really* wants that high line."

"So would I. He evaded my questions quite a while before he came out with the reason for wanting it," Wendy said. "I think perhaps Hugo Krueger may be the one who will use it for experiments. Perhaps, he's convinced the Schmidts that Kurt is interested."

"I'm relieved to hear that Mr. Schmidt wants it," Eva said in her soft voice. "Surely he wouldn't go to all that expense and trouble if they didn't plan to stay at Edgewater Inn all summer."

"That's why I didn't want to appear too curious," Wendy confessed. "Just the same, I'd like to know."

They had come to the straightaway. Duke shouted: "Let's race! Come on, Dolly! Show your heels to those old nags!"

Off the horses went in a wild and furious dash. All three riders were experts and the race was

close. Duke had a slight edge, at the start, and he was able to maintain his lead, though Wendy and Eva crowded him alternately. When the path narrowed again, they pulled up. Wendy came up a bad third, laughing and gay.

"As the loser, I'll fix a picnic lunch," she offered.

Eva laughed. "But I brought a surprise. It's all packed and ready for us back at the stables. Sarah told us to keep you away from the Inn until nine o'clock, so you could start your new week in the morning all rested and refreshed."

It was fun, Wendy decided, to be away from her problems for a while. But in spite of the lovely picnic site they chose, high on a bluff above the lake, her eyes kept straying back to the lights of Edgewater Inn. And all three were eager to talk about the mystery of the pearl robbery; Mrs. Schmidt's sudden indifference to her loss; the true reason back of Mr. Schmidt's request for a high line.

Finally Wendy sighed. "I've got to get back," she told them. "I haven't had a talk with Uncle Ed all day."

Eva yawned. "I'm a little weary, too. The life of a working gal is more strenuous than I thought."

They drove back to the Inn in Duke's battered

old roadster. "Just let me out at the drive," Wendy told him. "I'll go around to the kitchen side in the dark—I just want to see Uncle Ed for a few minutes and tumble into bed. If anyone else sees me, I may get involved in a long conversation. Thanks, loads, for the ride. It was a wonderful idea. And the picnic, Eva, was super-extra."

Wendy could hear the murmur of voices from the veranda so she skirted the lawn and rounded the corner of the Inn and crossed to the door of the darkened kitchen as quietly as she could. Every inch of the large room was familiar to her, so she didn't turn on the light. She had almost reached the door of the serving pantry before she heard the furtive voices, just outside in the court. With a shock, she realized that it was Mr. Schmidt! Involuntarily, she stopped to listen.

"The last order was highly satisfactory," he was saying in his familiar, oily tones. "I've had the report."

"Fine! Fine! Glad to hear it."

The other speaker was the Reverend Evermeyer!

Because she was so astonished to hear the two men talking so stealthily, Wendy missed part of the next sentence and she couldn't understand what she did hear.

It was the Kansas minister speaking and he was saying, "—from the same reliable source. I can furnish an unlimited number of the standard size pea shooters, and best of all, there's no advance in the price—"

The light snapped on in the serving pantry and the voices outside stopped abruptly.

Wendy, completely puzzled by the snatch of conversation she had overheard, went on through the door.

Sarah was standing by the light switch. "There you are!" she greeted Wendy. "Did you just come? I wanted to talk to you about a lot of things. Now, see here, Wendy, I don't want that finicky Miss Abbott poking about my kitchen any more."

Wendy rubbed her forehead wearily. "I'll ask her not to," she said. "She can give the menus to me and I'll bring them to you."

"And those dumb Boggs sisters! They'll be the death of me yet. Takes forever for them to get anything done, and what they do has to be done over."

"I'm not satisfied with them either, Sarah. I'll try to find time this week to hire some other help. It isn't going to be easy, now that all the resort hotels are opening for the season."

Sarah sniffed. "And as if things wasn't bad

enough already, I've just been sorting the laundry. Wendy, do you know that *all* the gentlemen tie knots in the corners of their handkerchiefs? Silliest thing I ever heard of."

Wendy started to laugh. She laughed uncontrollably, leaning against a dish cupboard and gasping—"This isn't—a summer resort—Sarah! It's an insane asylum!"

Sarah's thin face was lined with worry. "Wendy! Wendy! Stop that! Now, you get right to bed!"

CHAPTER IX

STORMY NIGHT

THERE WAS little sleep for Wendy that night.

She tumbled wearily into bed, hoping to drop right off, but her mind kept returning to her gradually growing fear that something sinister was happening under the roof of Edgewater Inn.

What was the meaning of that furtive, half-whispered conversation between the Reverend Ebermeyer and Mr. Schmidt—casual guests at a summer resort, who should be strangers? Why did Mr. Schmidt want a high line in his son's room? Why had Mrs. Schmidt acted so queerly about the loss of her pearls? What, really, had she and Jennie Boggs been discussing so excitedly in a foreign tongue? And why, in heaven's name, would all the men at Edgewater Inn tie knots in the corners of their handkerchiefs?

She could find no logical answer to any of her questions, and it was almost daylight before she'd decided to tell the whole story to Uncle Ed. Perhaps he could help her.

As soon as the breakfast tables were cleared and

the high line ordered, Wendy fled up the path to her uncle's workshop.

Her own troubles were instantly forgotten, however, once inside the cabin door.

Uncle Ed couldn't even manage a smile for her. He was sitting, white-faced and idle, staring down at the lake.

"Are you ill?" Wendy demanded.

He shook his head. "I'm just worried, Wendy. And when I worry and can't sleep, my fingers tremble so that I botch everything I touch."

"Uncle Ed, you mustn't worry. I'm sure the Schmidts are going to stay all summer." Swiftly she told him of the high line extension. "And they don't seem to be at all disturbed, because of the robbery."

A little color was coming back into the man's face. "That's good news," he said. "I was sure they'd be leaving at the end of their week. Sarah told me about the robbery, and I just couldn't see how the Inn could prosper with that kind of reputation."

"It was selfish of me to go off riding with Duke and Eva yesterday without telling you," Wendy said in quick remorse. "I came back early last evening to see you, but Sarah bustled me off to bed, and I didn't have a chance."

Her uncle sighed, and reached for his work

board. Wendy noted with relief that his fingers were no longer trembling as he picked up one of his curved knives. She chatted cheerfully with him for half an hour, forming plans as she talked.

She had resolved to say nothing to him about the mysterious problems troubling her. Perhaps she should bend all her energies to the work of the hotel; after all, the Schmidts' secrets were secondary.

"Uncle Ed," she said impulsively, "what did Dad and Mother do in the old days to keep the guests satisfied and happy?"

"Well, she organized bridge tournaments and shuffleboard contests and croquet matches," the man answered. "Offered small prizes, and the guests seemed to get quite a lot of fun out of it. But the thing that made the biggest hit was a sailing picnic out on the Island. About once a week she'd get Jim Lundeen to take the whole kit-and-caboodle out to the Island on his yawl."

Wendy chuckled. "So *that's* where they went! I remember years ago when I'd wake up from my afternoon nap, there wouldn't be anyone in the hotel except Sarah. She wouldn't tell me where everyone was, and I'd tease and tease. She'd just say they'd all be back, and sure enough the next morning the hotel would be full again."

"Jim Lundeen's still got his yawl," Uncle Ed pointed out.

"And it's a marvelous day for a picnic. We were going to have steaks tonight anyway—Uncle Ed, it's a swell idea!" Wendy waved good-bye, and streaked off down the path to organize the new adventure.

The picnic plans were announced at lunch, and made an instant hit with all the guests.

At four o'clock Jim Lundeen anchored his yawl off the Edgewater Inn dock, and Duke started taking the guests out in his motor boat two at a time. Wendy was delighted that everyone—even the Reverend Ebermeyer and his sallow-faced wife—had entered into the spirit of the outing.

Duke and Wendy made the final trip to the yawl with the heaped-up baskets of food and the steak grills.

"I'm kind of surprised that you could get the Schmidts away from Kurt's experiments," Duke told her. "Everyone seemed to have a hand in them—except me."

"I was so busy going over to talk with Jim Lundeen and helping Sarah with the food that I forgot all about the high line," Wendy confessed.

"The men from the light company were all through by eleven o'clock. Lindsley and Thomp-

son spent most of the morning in Kurt's room. They carried in a bunch of boxes from their car. I offered to help, too, but they froze me out. Afraid of a tip, I suppose."

The motor boat came alongside the yawl, and the skipper helped stow the baskets that Wendy and Duke held up to him. Jim Lundeen was a laconic, ruddy-faced old sailor. He was the weather and water authority for all Cottey. "I don't like the feel of it, Miss Wendy," he muttered as he expertly made the tow-line of Duke's boat fast. "Ye'd better eat as soon as ye kin after we dock. The wind's shiftin' fast."

"Is there any danger?" Wendy demanded in an urgent whisper.

The old skipper shook his head. "Not unless she blows up a lot faster. But I'd advise ye not to dawdle too long over yer eats."

The sun was still bright, but the wind was uneven; the waves choppy. With inward alarm, Wendy noted that the old sailor used only the mainsail. The yawl skimmed over the water in the briefest trip to the Island that Wendy had ever taken. In fact, the skipper sailed completely around the horseshoe-shaped piece of land, to enter the deep bay from the sheltered side. He laid the craft alongside the dock with a veteran's skill.

The guests had gasped as they'd rounded the long point of the bay, for the lodge was an impressive sight from a distance. It was a stone-and-log building, long deserted and decayed. Years before it had been the summer home of a millionaire. There had been a squabble over the ownership after his death. In the long litigation the place had gone to decay. No one was sure who owned it now, but the people of Cottey believed that the property had returned to the state and they hoped it would some time become a park.

"Why didn't you tell me this was here?" Mr. Schmidt demanded of Wendy.

"I just never thought of it. We take it for granted, I guess," the girl replied. "It can't be seen from the mainland, of course."

"But it's magnificent! It should be restored. What a wonderful retreat from the city!" he declared. "Is it for sale?"

Wendy shrugged. "No one seems to know who owns it—or care, very much. It really is in pretty bad shape. We had a picnic over here a couple of weeks ago. I noticed then that the porches were rotting away from the foundation. The ice house has collapsed completely since last summer."

The sun went under, blotted out by a huge

black cloud. Jim Lundeen scowled significantly at Wendy.

"Everybody bring two big sticks for the fire!" she shouted, as they scurried along the dock. "We'll build our fire on the beach right away."

Mr. Schmidt, ignoring her command, had started up the slope toward the lodge. Lindsley and Thompson followed him. A moment later the tutor, Kurt, Bob Patton, Mr. Alexander and the minister from Kansas were trailing along.

Wendy looked after them ruefully. "It looks as if everybody left will have to bring four sticks," she announced.

With Duke's and Eva's help, Wendy soon had a magnificent beach fire blazing. They selected a spot sheltered from the wind, but even so the stiffening breeze threatened to scatter the coals.

Jim Lundeen offered his assistance in broiling the steaks.

"Does the weather look worse?" Wendy whispered to him as she turned the sizzling meat.

"It ain't no better," the old skipper answered. "If y'ask me, ye'd better round 'em up, feed 'em and get 'em back to the mainland."

Wendy appealed to Mrs. Alexander and Mary Patton. "Would you run get the men? Mr. Lundeen thinks we'd better have our steaks right

away and get back to the Inn. The storm is coming up faster than we'd thought."

Mrs. Alexander looked frightened, but Mary Patton laughed, and said, "Oh! Isn't that exciting? I think it's so clever of you natives to try to make our little excursions adventurous!"

Jim Lundeen snorted, but Wendy replied seriously, "We can't stage storms on order, and I'm afraid this one isn't fooling. Besides, the steaks are nearly ready, and they won't be any good, burned to a crisp and cold."

It was quite dark, and the thunder was rolling ominously before the picnic was finished. Wendy was just cutting the huge chocolate cake for dessert when the rain started to pound down.

Wendy turned to the skipper. "Hadn't we better take shelter on the porch until the worst of it blows over?"

The old sailor nodded, and the picnickers followed Wendy's hurried retreat to the lodge.

Duke snatched the coffee pot and a basket; everyone carried pillows or blankets or food. Laughing, they had the cake and coffee in the gloom of the wide veranda.

When they had finished Mr. Schmidt produced his old-fashioned gold watch and told Hugo Krueger to strike a match and see the time.

"It's six-thirty," the tutor told him. "Plenty of time. It's so dark, I thought it must be after seven."

"How long will it take for the run back to the Inn?" Mr. Schmidt demanded of the skipper.

"Not long, if ye could keep the boat from shipping too much water," Jim Lundeen replied. "But I never have run the Nancy Belle out in a storm like this, and I ain't goin' to start tonight."

"You mean we'll have to stay here until it blows over?" Wendy gasped.

"My good man," Mr. Schmidt said patronizingly, "I must be back at the Inn by nine o'clock."

"Ye'll have to swim if it's still blowin'."

"We have blankets and pillows," Wendy interposed. "It may not be so bad in this sheltered wing of the porch. As long as the rain doesn't blow in—"

"Don't be so stupid!" Mr. Schmidt shouted, above the noise of the storm. "I've got to be back at the hotel by nine o'clock, do you understand? I've got to. And you can order that dumb ox to take me, storm or no storm."

A flash of lightning revealed a whitefaced Wendy, her determined little chin set stubbornly. "I'm afraid I can't take that risk, Mr. Schmidt. If Mr. Lundeen feels it's too dangerous to sail the

Nancy Belle, he knows what he's talking about, and he *is* the skipper."

"You insolent little snip!" the man raged. "Don't you dare talk to me like that!"

CHAPTER X

ROUGH RETURN

"If it's as important as that—a life-and-death matter—I'll take you back in the motor boat," Duke said quietly.

"I can't let you take the risk, Duke!" Wendy exclaimed.

"I'll be all right. I could swim it, if I had to," the boy declared, resolutely. "Can you swim, Mr. Schmidt?"

"Of course. Let's go!"

Jim Lundeen sighed. "If ye have to act like fools, ye'd better take some of them cork life preservers from the yawl."

"Are you going, Krueger?" The words, in Schmidt's anger, were more of a threatening command than a question.

"I'll go, too," Wendy decided. "I can't let you go into that danger alone. We'll wait until the storm dies down and then come back. You couldn't get to shore without us."

"Your Uncle Ed isn't going to like this," Jim Lundeen warned.

"I don't like it myself," Wendy snapped. "But

it looks as if it must be done. Come on, Duke."

She turned up the small collar of her jacket and plunged into the storm and the darkness. The others followed, with Eva calling after them in a quaking voice: "Don't forget the life belts—"

The rain was slashing down mercilessly. Duke ordered the two men to sit on the center seat, after they'd fastened their life preserver straps. He handed a couple of tin cans to them, and told them to bail water out as fast and steadily as they could. Wendy, in the prow, held a storm lantern and stood ready to cast off as soon as Duke started the motor.

It was cold, and the boy worked furiously to get it going. All four were drenched to the skin before it caught.

The girl in the prow was chilled, shivering and miserable. And she hated the fat, obstinate man in the center of the boat with a fury she'd never felt before in her life. What was so important that he had to risk four lives in order to be at Edgewater Inn at nine o'clock? Surely, he couldn't be so witless as not to realize the danger.

Duke was nursing the strength of the motor. In the shelter of the bay the waves weren't so high. Even so, the two men in the center of the boat were sloshing the water over the sides of the boat in frantic haste.

Outside the protection of the arms of land, however, it was a different story. A dozen times Wendy thought they were lost as they plunged into the choppy waves. Each time the sturdy little motor kept them going. Duke was handling the small boat with consummate skill. Schmidt and Krueger, working in feverish haste, were too absorbed in their task to see the huge walls of water sweeping down on them. Suddenly, with horrible sputters, the motor died.

"Give me the cans!" Duke shouted. "Take the oars and I'll bail!"

"Get the motor started!" Schmidt snarled.

"Impossible." Duke stated the fact calmly. "You'll do as I say, or we'll capsize sure. Wendy, can you help with the bailing and still hold the light?"

"Sure. And you two get going with those oars!" Wendy ordered, her voice hard with anger.

Fat Mr. Schmidt probably hadn't worked so strenuously in years. Duke kept up a running stream of orders as he bailed, keeping the pull on the two oars even. The tutor was in excellent physical condition and was an expert oarsman. Wendy could see that it was difficult for him to restrain himself to Schmidt's short, choppy strokes.

Gradually, through the blinding rain, the lights of Edgewater Inn became distinguishable.

"We're going to make it!" Wendy shouted triumphantly to Duke.

The storm was dying a bit. The wind howled with less fury and the cutting rain decreased in intensity.

At long last, the struggling navigators could see the outlines of the Edgewater Inn dock.

"We're almost there!" Wendy sang out. She dropped the can with which she'd been splashing water from the boat and clutched the rope, ready to leap to the dock.

There was almost a calm, as they pulled alongside. Schmidt slumped forward, exhausted.

"*Gott in himmel!*" he breathed.

"Why, you're German!" Wendy exclaimed. "Your wife told me she was Czech, and I supposed you were, too."

The man straightened wrathfully, and Wendy was terrified at the intensity of his reaction. He seized her arm in a cruel grip and rasped, "Miss Ralston, don't be too inquisitive about things which don't concern you! If you and your young friends know what's good for your health, you'll not be too curious about my affairs. Don't forget it!"

There was no mistaking the threat in his voice, or the depth of the rage in his little pig-like eyes.

Wendy shuddered involuntarily, and it wasn't because of the chill of her soaked garments.

She was afraid.

CHAPTER XI

HALF A SIGNAL

"COME ON, Krueger! We've no time to lose!" Schmidt's command was urgent, and the tutor hurried along the dock behind his chief.

"Duke!" Wendy cried. "Did you hear what that horrible man said to me?"

"No. You can tell me later—the most important thing right now is for both of us to change to dry clothes. You're shivering."

Wendy noted with surprise that she was trembling uncontrollably. Her teeth chattered as she asked, "Do you—you have something dry at—at the Inn to change to?"

"Sure. Some work clothes. Get going, Wendy!"

The girl turned, then, and ran through the rain which was falling gently. She chose the kitchen door, to avoid tracking so much water and mud into the lobby and halls of the Inn.

Sarah was reading in the kitchen, and turned to look at Wendy in horror. "Child! Whatever

has come over that Jim Lundeen to bring you back in such a storm!"

"He—he didn't," Wendy told her, shaking. "Sarah, fix—fix us some hot tea, will you? I—I guess I'd beter change."

"I'll help you. Just drop your jacket there on the linoleum. And take off those wet oxfords and socks this minute. You can go to your room in your bare feet."

Gratefully Wendy accepted Sarah's aid. She was almost at the end of her strength and endurance.

In warm dry clothes, and after a cup of strong tea, Wendy revived. Duke seemed none the worse for the experience.

"What was eatin' on that fool Schmidt to make you bring him back in such a storm?" Sarah demanded, after they'd told their story. "I thought that Jim Lundeen would have sense enough to bed you all down at the lodge until this had blown over."

Duke grinned. "I'll see if I can find out. Sarah, give me a pot of that tea and a couple of cups, and I'll take it over to the south wing."

"Better get their wet clothes, too," Sarah grumbled. "We'll be lucky if the Edgewater Inn isn't a pneumonia hospital before the end of the week."

Wendy and Sarah waited in eager curiosity for Duke to return. He came in a few minutes, still chuckling.

"How did you make out?" Wendy asked.

"Boy, did I get swooshed out of there in a hurry!" he reported. "They were monkeying around in Kurt's room and I knocked on the door. Old Schmidt just snarled at me to get away and mind my own business. But when I said I had some hot tea, Krueger came to the door and took it."

"Could you see what they were doing?" Wendy asked.

"Not a chance. Krueger just opened the door wide enough to take the tray and he stood so's I couldn't possibly see around him. And Schmidt yelled not to worry about their clothes—they'd tend to them later."

"I'd certainly like to know what goes on," Wendy said, her voice strained. "I'll never forget the vicious way he looked at me when I said he must be German—"

The kitchen was abruptly plunged into darkness.

"Gosh! I wonder if the power plant has failed!" Duke exclaimed.

Sarah moved swiftly to the kitchen window and looked across the court to the south wing. "The

lights are out in Kurt Schmidt's room, too," she announced.

"Lightning may have struck the big line out on the highway," Wendy guessed. "Do you suppose we'd better call and report it?"

"Maybe the telephone's gone, too," Duke suggested.

Sarah sighed. "Hope I can find those candles in the dark. They're on a shelf in the pantry."

"We can light the ones in the candelabra," Wendy said, "if we can find some matches. Where do you keep them since we got the electric stove, Sarah?"

"Same place," Sarah told her shortly. "I couldn't see any point in moving the match box just because—"

She was interrupted by an irate voice, shouting from the lobby. "What's the matter with this backwoods dump?" Mr. Schmidt was thundering.

"Just a minute," Wendy answered. "We're finding some candles—"

"Candles! What good are candles? What happened? Did the lightning hit the power line?"

Wendy had made her way to the dining room by the thin flicker of a match. "As soon as we have a little more light, I'm going to telephone to see if the lights are out, all up and down the line."

Schmidt groaned and turned to Krueger, hovering helplessly in the corridor behind him. "Ten minutes! In ten minutes it will be too late! If the power isn't on in ten minutes we'll leave this hole tomorrow, Miss Ralston!"

Wendy's fingers were trembling, but her voice was sure as she replied, "We'll do everything we can, Mr. Schmidt. But if lightning has struck the high line, even you will have to admit that it can't be blamed on my youth and inexperience."

"Of course, it could be a blown-out fuse," Duke announced.

"There are some spares in the bottom of the switch-box," Sarah told him. "I'll hold the candles while you see—"

Wendy, Schmidt and Krueger formed a breathless trio in the background, while Duke worked.

"Here it is!" he cried delightedly as he unscrewed and examined one of the blackened plugs. A few seconds later, the lights flashed on.

Krueger swung back through the kitchen door. "Hurry up!" he cried, urgently. "There's still time. I must have stepped the juice up too fast at first. I caught half a signal before the electricity failed—"

The slam of the dining room door, back of the retreating figure of Mr. Schmidt, shut off the rest of the tutor's words.

CHAPTER XII

AN ERRAND

AT MIDNIGHT Duke announced that the storm had quieted enough for a safe return trip to the Island.

Wendy insisted on going with him, over Sarah's objections. Sarah gave in finally, after seeing that both of them were bundled up warmly, with the added protection of rain coats and waterproof hats.

The howling wind was spent but there was still a brisk breeze. The waves were breaking in white caps, and Wendy was busy bailing water all the way. Fortunately, the motor had started without a struggle.

As soon as they rounded into the quiet bay of the Island, Duke raced the motor noisily and Wendy signalled with the storm light. By the time the motor boat pulled alongside the yawl, Jim Lundeen had the party on board.

"I was so worried about you!" Eva murmured as Wendy jumped aboard the Nancy Belle.

"It was a wild ride," Wendy confessed, tying

the painter, "but we made it all right. The motor got wet, and Mr. Schmidt and Mr. Krueger had to row."

"They got there in time?" Bob Patton demanded.

Wendy noticed, with a quick glance of her observant eyes, that all the men of the party were waiting tensely for her answer. "Sure," she said, after the imperceptible pause.

What was this conspiracy? Why did all the men who were guests at Edgewater Inn seem aware of Schmidt's "experiments"? Why was she, the proprietor of the hotel, kept in ignorance?

Resolutely she turned the conversation to other, safer channels. "Did you get along all right, while we were gone?" she asked Jim Lundeen.

The skipper, assisted by Duke, was busy unfurling the sails which had been fastened so securely against the storm. "Sure. Most of 'em slept after you left."

The rain had stopped. There were even a few stars, and the air was fresh and exhilarating. The yawl moved briskly away from the dock, and Duke flopped to the deck beside Wendy and Eva.

"Any food left in those baskets?" he demanded. "I suddenly seem to be a hollow void in the middle."

"Me, too!" Wendy exclaimed. "I hadn't realized it before."

"There were dozens of sandwiches left," Eva announced. She pulled one of the baskets toward her, and pulled out a waxed-paper bundle. "These have meat filling, I think, and there are some peanut-butter and jelly ones in another basket."

Everyone seemed to be in a gay mood, now that all the danger and discomforts of the storm had passed, and there was quite a jolly second picnic on board the yawl.

As they were eating Wendy said lightly, "Now, if I just had six dozen new sheets and twelve dozen new pillow-cases, and ten sets of curtains, I could relax this week."

"Gee whiz!" Duke exclaimed. "I meant to tell you several days ago, Wendy—I have an uncle with a big wholesale linen company in Chicago. Mother suggested that I drive down and see him about equipment for the Inn. He'd give you a swell price."

"Grand! What a piece of luck!" Wendy cried. "How soon could you go?"

"Why, in the morning, I guess. Unless you had something else you wanted me to do."

"I can't think of anything else that's half as important."

"I'll leave about seven. That'll get me there about noon," Duke planned. "It isn't more than two hundred and fifty miles to Chicago, and I guess my old jaloppy is good for that."

"Are you going to Chicago, young man?" the Reverend Ebermeyer inquired from the dock opposite.

"Yes, sir. In the morning," Duke answered.

"Would you care to run an errand for me? I have a package that should be there tomorrow. I had intended to mail it this evening when we returned from the trip, but of course, it's too late now."

"I'll be glad to, Reverend," Duke answered.

"Fine. It'll be worth a dollar to me. Will your destination be near South Dearborn, by any chance?"

"Yes. My uncle's offices are near the Dearborn Street station, in fact."

"Better and better!" the minister declared. "It'll be worth a dollar to me, young man, to get the package there tomorrow. Knock on my door at the Inn, just before you leave."

"Sure seven won't be too early?"

The minister chuckled. "Ah! This soft younger generation! All the boys and girls, nowadays, have never heard the fine old motto, 'Early to bed and early to rise—' "

Duke laughed. "Well, this isn't exactly my idea of early to bed."

"True. True. But my habit of early rising is so firmly established that even on these rare occasions when I am up until midnight, I still am out of my bed at six every morning. It's a fine, quiet hour for meditation and study of the Good Book."

There was something false and insincere in his tone, and Wendy's thoughts wandered again to the strange assortment of guests at Edgewater Inn. She was weary and exhausted, and the queer incidents of the last week seemed to blur and merge into one black threat against her safety and happiness—

But the night was to reveal yet another odd link in the series before Wendy slept.

After all the guests had gone to their rooms at the end of the excursion, Wendy made a last trip to see that all the doors were fastened and hall windows closed.

The transom was open in the Reverend Ebermeyer's room, and Wendy could hear a violent, low-pitched conversation. She recognized Harry Alexander's usually meek voice.

He was sputtering, "You ignorant fool! Do you want to give the whole show away? What's the idea of giving that boy the package? And the address?"

The minister was conciliatory. "Harry, you're seeing ghosts. That lad is too young, too stupid to see anything. And that material has to get there today. Surely, you didn't expect me to drive to Chicago with it?"

"It would have been better. Lindsley or Thompson could have taken it. I don't envy your position when the boss finds out what—"

There was a movement in the obscure reaches of the dim hall, and Wendy walked on hurriedly without looking back.

CHAPTER XIII

WEEK OF GRACE

WEARY AS she was, Wendy set her alarm clock for five-thirty the next morning, so she could warn Duke of the possible dangers of his trip.

But the sun was high before she roused. Sarah, at the first tinkle of the bell, had slipped into her room and turned off the alarm. Duke had been gone an hour before Wendy awoke and realized it was too late to give him the message.

Uncle Ed was having his breakfast in the kitchen when she went down.

"Everyone is sleeping late this morning," Sarah said in greeting. "You're still in plenty of time to serve your tables in the dining room."

"Probably everyone is worn out after the gay outing," Wendy replied bitterly. "Oh, Uncle Ed! I'm afraid I've ruined everything—"

Eva appeared at the door. "There's a call for you on the telephone, Mr. Ralston. Shall I tell them you're having breakfast and will call them later?"

"No. I'll come."

Uncle Ed, after years of practice, could handle his wheel chair with amazing dexterity. He rolled through the pantry door to the hall and then to the reception lobby.

He was back in a very short time. "Sarah, could I have another cup of coffee, please?"

Wendy noted that his hands were trembling, again. Poor Uncle Ed!

"Who called?" she asked casually.

"Lester Savage at the bank. They have an offer to buy Edgewater Inn."

The glass of orange juice slipped from Wendy's nerveless fingers and shattered on the floor. "Oh, Sarah! I'm sorry! On the clean floor!"

Sarah seized a broom and dust-pan and swept up the shiny splinters. "Didn't lose much. Y'ain't goin' to sell, are ye, Ed Ralston?"

"I don't know," the man said slowly. "We've got a week."

"Oh, we can't sell Edgewater Inn!" Wendy cried. "It's—it's our home!"

"It'd be better than losing it," her uncle pointed out bitterly. "They'll take over the mortgage and give us five hundred dollars in cash."

"But that's a ridiculous offer!" Wendy protested. "Who wants to buy it?"

"Lester Savage wouldn't tell. He said we could take the offer as it stands, or lose the hotel

the first of September, and the bank would sell it."

"But we aren't going to lose it." Wendy straightened, her courage flooding back. "They can't take it away from us!"

"I'm not so sure," her uncle replied. "Lester Savage said he'd heard a lot of criticism about the way we were runnin' the hotel. Said he'd heard some ugly stories about unsolved robberies and that the food wasn't so good."

"He did, did he?" Sarah slapped her mop rag vigorously on the spilled orange juice.

Wendy was still standing, white with anger. "He has no right to say such things. Uncle Ed, I'm going right down to that bank and find out where those stories started. He doesn't need to worry about his old mortgage. We'll find the money somewhere. We'll still have a little of the original loan, and we've made money so far. It's early in the season—"

Sarah rinsed out her mop rag with more vigor than was necessary. "Now, Wendy, there ain't no call to get so upset. We've still got a week to decide on Mr. Lester Savage's generous offer. A lot can happen in a week as we've already discovered. Now, you just sit down and finish that omelet before it gets too cold."

"But if someone wanted to buy the hotel, why didn't they come directly to us? No one has

looked at it, that I know about, who wanted to buy it."

"Probably Lester Savage wants it himself." Sarah sniffed contemptuously. "I've known him since we were in the eighth grade, and he's always been grasping and greedy. We'll just see about Mr. Savage. Heard the food's no good! Well, he'd better not come around to try it, or I might slip him a nice side-dish of rat poison. Only thing is, it wouldn't hurt him a bit. He wouldn't know the difference."

Wendy giggled, suddenly restored to good humor. "Sarah, you're probably right. I'll bet it is just his way of trying to get the Edgewater Inn for next to nothing."

"The Schmidts are coming into the dining room for breakfast," Eva warned from the pantry door. "I'll take care of their first course, Wendy, while you finish yours."

And the routine of the day started.

Wendy had little time to consider the happenings of the day before, or the threat of the banker's message until just before dinner when Duke returned.

He beamed at the girl triumphantly. "Your sheets, pillow-cases and new curtains will be here in the morning, Miss Ralston. And I think I really wangled a good bargain for you."

"Good! Come on down to the dock and tell me all about it."

Duke, a little bewildered at Wendy's mysterious manner, followed her across the road and down to the water. "What's the idea of coming clear down here?"

"I wanted to talk with you where we couldn't be overheard." Swiftly, she outlined the conversation she had overheard the night before.

"It was a queer dump where I took the Reverend's package," Duke said. "It was an old building with a lot of queer businesses on the directory. The elevator was just a shaky cage, and this outfit of Ebermeyer's was called the Patriotic Specialty Company."

"Certainly couldn't learn much from the name," Wendy observed.

"And you couldn't tell much from the office. There were a half-dozen pale girls, typing or addressing envelopes in long hand. And a boy who was operating a cutting-machine took my package. There were a lot of cardboard boxes and stacks of paper along one wall, but I think there must have been more offices, back of them. Anyway, a man came from behind the false front, and I heard a door close. He looked kind of startled when he saw me, but he went out without saying anything."

CHAPTER XIV

BOAT FROM THE BLUE

DUKE AND Wendy exchanged puzzled glances, for they had heard the muffled roar of the powerful motors at the same time.

The boy shaded his hands against the setting sun, and identified the sound with a tone of excitement in his voice. "It's the biggest plane I ever saw!"

The mammoth flying boat seemed to fly straight toward them over the water.

"It's a seaplane—or do I mean an amphibian?" Wendy cried.

They strained their eyes, and as the huge transport circled overhead they could read "U. S. Navy Aircraft Scouting Force" along the side. The ship was powered by four motors, the whirling propellers almost invisible in their speed.

They watched breathlessly, scarcely believing the sight. The big plane was landing directly in front of Edgewater Inn!

The boat floated a hundred yards from shore.

An egg-shaped door in the side was flung open, and a uniformed man leaned out and shouted through a megaphone: "How about a lift to shore, Buddy?"

"Right away, sir!" Duke yelled happily.

In his awe and haste, he forgot to cross his fingers—but the motor of his little craft caught at once.

Quite a crowd of curious spectators had gathered when Duke returned to the dock with three passengers. One of them was the uniformed officer who had shouted to Duke.

The boy was grinning from ear to ear. "Wendy! Guess who's still on the plane?"

Wendy smiled. "I can't. Who?"

"Steve Booth! He's a full-fledged ensign now, and co-pilot!"

The officer smiled as he addressed Wendy. "Miss Ralston, the young man said you were the proprietor of this Inn, and that you might be able to give the nine of us dinner tonight, and lodging for seven."

Wendy maintained her poise and answered easily, "We'd be honored. Would you like to come with me now, or would you prefer to wait for the others?"

"We'll go with you." The erect officer introduced himself. "I'm Lieutenant-Commander

George Neff of Patrol Squadron 6. This is Mr. Troy. And Mr. Gibson."

"How do you do." Wendy gave the men a bright smile, and turned to lead the way through the crowd that had gathered. Out of nowhere a dozen youngsters had raced to gaze at the big plane and the travelers. Several guests from Edgewater Inn had strolled across the highway, and the others were sitting on the porch, watching with open interest.

While the new guests were registering, Wendy excused herself and fled to the kitchen to warn Sarah.

"It's a good thing them others ain't here," the cook said grimly. "If they're late, they'll be lucky to get ham and eggs at this rate."

"Who?" Wendy asked, puzzled.

"Why, them Pattons, and that Lindsley and his shadow. They've been gone all day."

"I'll have to take these men to their rooms," Wendy said. "It looks like a busy evening."

The extra guests weren't as much work as Wendy had expected.

Steve Booth, tall, tanned and much older-looking than Wendy remembered him as a student in Cottey high school three years before, had elected to eat dinner with her and Duke, after the others had finished.

Two of the crew would eat later, also, since they didn't want to leave the big boat unattended.

And the Pattons and Lindsley and Thompson failed to return in time for dinner.

Wendy, as she assisted with the serving, noticed that the Reverend Ebermeyer had chosen the table next to the newcomers, and had blandly introduced himself to the four men in uniform, and Mr. Troy and Mr. Gibson, who were in civilian clothes.

As soon as all the guests were served with dessert, Miss Abbott motioned to Wendy. "You and Eva can eat with the boys," she offered. "Why don't you two slip upstairs and get into something cooler? I can take care of the other tables."

Wendy flashed the older woman a glance of gratitude, and motioned to Eva.

Gaily, the two girls raced to Wendy's room and changed to pastel frocks of linen. Wendy's was a pale rose that brought out the lights of her honey-colored curls and color to her cheeks; Eva's was a becoming shade of light green.

When they returned to the dining room the boys were waiting. Wendy led the way to a table for four with a pleasant view of the water.

She noticed that the Schmidts were lingering over their desserts.

"This is a delightful surprise, your dropping down out of the blue," Wendy told the young aviator.

"It was for me, too," Steve confessed. "We were really on our way to Green Bay, but when I said this used to be my home town, Lieutenant-Commander Davidson, my superior, suggested to Lieutenant-Commander Neff that we stay here tonight, and it was all right with him."

"What are you doing way up here?" Duke demanded. "I thought all the Naval Air Bases were in the south."

"They are. This is one of my familiarization flights—I don't know yet what branch of Navy Aviation I'm to specialize in," the young man told them. "I'm not free to tell you much about the purpose of this particular trip, but Mr. Troy represents the Bureau of Aeronautics, and Mr. Gibson is with one of the big airplane factories."

Wendy had an uncomfortable feeling of being watched, and she turned to look squarely at the Schmidts. They had dropped all pretense of eating and were frankly listening to the conversation.

Adroitly, the quick-witted girl changed the subject. "Steve, tell us what comes before. I know Duke is interested in aviation, and I really don't know much about your training. I know you went to college in the east for a couple of years."

"I was lucky," Steve told them, grinning. "You see, the Navy prefers four-year college-trained men, but they will take two-year fellows if their grades are high. The depression had hit Dad pretty hard, and he'd lost his store here, so it was a pretty important point for me. I'd have had to drop the rest of my college anyway. I took the first thirty days at the Reserve Station at Squantom, Mass., and I was lucky enough not to get washed out there."

"Isn't that the one started through the efforts of Rear Admiral Richard Byrd?" Duke broke in, eagerly.

"That's right. Soon there'll be thirteen similar bases in the thirteen districts."

"Oh-ho!" Wendy remarked significantly. "The Navy must not believe in unlucky signs!"

Duke looked uncomfortable for a moment and then said, "Maybe they'll add a few more during the next two years while I'm in college."

"I've read about the terrific tests they give the new ones," Eva interposed shyly. "It must have been hard."

"I did think it was tough at the time," Steve replied, "but I was only beginning! After ten hours dual instruction, you go up for an hour solo. I got through that with only a mild case of jitters, and then I went on to Pensacola."

"Gosh!" Duke breathed admiringly. "I'd give my eye teeth to get there!"

Steve laughed, genuinely amused. "It's your back teeth you think you're losing, the first time you spank one of those big thirteen-ton boats into some tough waves!"

Wendy noted with relief that her trick had worked.

The Schmidts were leaving the dining room, reluctantly.

"I've read about that," Duke confessed. "Gosh, I think I could almost tell you your routine at Pensacola—"

"Why don't you try it, while I tackle this steak? I'm hungry," Steve pointed out. "I've been doing all the talking, while the rest of you were eating."

Duke closed his eyes, concentrating. "Well, if you flew in the morning, then you had classes in the afternoon."

"O.K., but in reverse for me. I flew in the afternoon."

"You had lectures and classes in navigation, meteorology, air traffic rules and regulations, all about the fundamentals of internal combustion engines—air-cooled radial type and liquid cooled-in-line models—engineering problems, radio transmission and reception, the Morse code, and

—parachute design and the proper use of same!" Duke finished triumphantly.

"That's right!" Steve praised. "Everything but airplane stress analysis—and the fun we had. I even learned how to play polo. And we had sailing and boxing and golf and fishing and dancing. It's quite a place, really."

"I don't see how you had time and strength to do all those things," Wendy marveled.

"Well, the health requirements are pretty rigid, in the first place. The tough routine soon teaches you to concentrate when you're studying and play hard when you have the chance. It's worth it. I hope you don't think I'm telling you this to be boasting, but I can send Dad and Mom a hundred bucks a month, save fifty, and still have fifty-five for spending money. Our clothing, uniforms, quarters and sustenance are furnished, and we even get expenses on a trip like this.

"You see, it costs the tax-payers of this country thousands of dollars to train one of us, and we have to think of ourselves as fairly expensive investments on the part of America."

"I see where I'm going to have to study like everything to make it," Duke said, solemn resolution in his tone.

"I'll send you a list of the required subjects

you'll have to know," Steve offered. "It'll help when you make out your schedule at the University next fall."

When they had finished dinner, Steve said wistfully, "I haven't been in Cottey for three years. I'd like to go around and see some of the boys."

"Sure thing! If you don't mind riding in a broken-down car."

"Would you girls care to go with us?" Steve asked politely.

Wendy chuckled. "I'm afraid we'd cramp Duke's style a bit. He's dying to show you off to the other fellows—"

The boys denied the charge vehemently, but Wendy continued to refuse the invitation. After they had gone, she explained to Eva. "After all, Steve's own friends are three classes ahead of us —he'll want to see some of the girls his own age who are home from college this summer."

"You remember everything, Wendy!" Eva exclaimed. "I shouldn't have been tactful enough to think of that!"

"Besides, I think I'd better stay around the Inn this evening. We have some important guests, who deserve the best of attention. Sarah said that the Pattons and Mr. Lindsley and Mr. Thompson have been gone all day. They may be

coming back, tired and hungry, and Miss Abbott and Sarah have had more than their share of the work."

Eva sighed a little wearily. "Then, if it's all right with you, I think I'll run on home. All this excitement has exhausted me. Good night, Wendy."

CHAPTER XV

MISSING CAR

WENDY WASN'T free to check on the comfort of her distinguished guests immediately.

Al Barry, the youthful radioman on the big plane, had borrowed Duke's motorboat to go out and relieve the co-pilot, Dave Naylor, and Mike O'Donnell, machinist's mate, so they could eat dinner at the Inn. The latter two were to stand guard on the plane overnight. Therefore, they didn't register at the Inn. They ate dinner leisurely, in no rush to return to duty.

Still the Lindsley car, with the Pattons and Thompson, failed to return.

It was almost nine o'clock when the two officers finished dinner, and Wendy concluded the other guests had obtained their dinner elsewhere.

Just as the machinist's mate and the co-pilot were sipping the last of their coffee, Lieutenant-Commander Neff came to the dining-room door and signalled to Wendy.

"Do you have a room where a half-dozen of us can talk business privately?"

Wendy peered through the window at the softly-lighted screened verandah. She grasped the situation instantly. The officers and Mr. Troy and Mr. Gibson had been unable to discuss their affairs because the Reverend Ebermeyer and Mr. Schmidt had invited themselves into the group!

Wendy frowned a little as she thought.

There was really no large room in the Inn that would be comfortable for a six-man conference without running the risk of being overheard.

Uncle Ed's cabin!

Wendy smiled swiftly. When she answered her voice was so low that it carried only to the ears of the waiting officer. "I know just the place—my uncle's work cabin up in the pines above the hotel. If you'll call the others, I'll lead the way with my flashlight—it's less than a block."

"Splendid! Sounds like a perfect spot for us."

Wendy raced to get the key from her uncle, then borrowed a flashlight from the kitchen equipment.

Her uncle was pleased to extend the hospitality of his little cabin. "Tell the men that you and I will sit out in the court, and see that they're not disturbed," he told Wendy. "And I'd be honored if they cared to use my pipe tobacco in the humidifier on my work bench—"

Wendy repeated the message to the men as she led the way up the path.

"Thank you," Lieutenant-Commander Neff replied. "Our talk shouldn't take more than an hour, but it is important that it shouldn't be overheard by unfriendly ears."

Wendy and her uncle, relaxing in the quiet, moon-lit court, had a satisfying chat. The girl repeated the interesting information that Steve had imparted at dinner. "I hadn't realized that Duke was so bent on getting into the air service, although he's loved planes and motors since we were in kindergarten," Wendy concluded.

"It's a wonderful career for a healthy young man," Uncle Ed answered with a little sigh. "And to anyone who loves water, navy aviation is a complete answer, it seems to me."

Wendy chuckled. "Poor Duke wouldn't have much time to cross his fingers and hunt for four-leaf clovers in the kind of schedule Steve outlined! I wonder if he'd refuse to go up if a black cat crossed his path, or if he broke a mirror?"

In a remarkably brief time, it seemed, the men came down the path, and returned the key and the flashlight to Wendy. The officer was smiling. "I think I've been able to win the others to my way of thinking, Miss Ralston. We're pretty

much in agreement—and we also agreed that it was time to turn in."

"Almost everyone seems to be turning in early tonight," Wendy said. "My uncle and I have noticed that the lights all over the Inn have been going out. I know I'm ready to call it a day."

"I suppose Ensign Booth is going to make a night of it with his old home-town friends." The officer laughed. "Well, he's young—he can take it."

Good nights were exchanged and the court was quiet again.

Wendy rolled her uncle's wheelchair to his room, and brushed his forehead with a tender kiss. What a pity that he was crippled! She knew how he must be longing to return to active duty with the Coast Guard, now that his country's defenses had need of his able mind and wealth of experience!

Although she was weary from the day's excitements, Wendy wasn't able to sleep.

Her mind churned over recent experiences.

What was going on in that mysterious office where Duke had taken the Reverend Ebermeyer's package? And why had the minister been so openly curious about the Navy officials and their trip? What was the big scouting plane doing up here in this remote, peaceful point in Wisconsin?

Where could Lindsley and Thompson and the Pattons have been all day and half the night?

She finally dozed, but she was startled awake by the sputtering noise of Duke's motor boat. Still dazed with sleep, she bolted from bed and drew on her soft flannel house-coat. What in the world were those goofy boys doing with the boat at this hour? She really hadn't the slightest idea of what time it was, but the moon had disappeared and it was pitch black outside.

The clock in the town hall, a mile away, boomed twice through the stillness.

She ran downstairs and went out on the veranda, peering through the screen. She could see the dark shape of the big plane floating serenely on the water, its wing-lights glowing in the dark.

It was several minutes before Wendy could distinguish the shape of Duke's small boat.

"The silly is running without his lights!" Wendy exclaimed. A moment later she realized the fainter sounds of the motor indicated that the craft was headed for the Island. "I suppose Steve wanted to see it for sentimental reasons," Wendy thought. "If I'd been away from Cottey for three years, I imagine that's one of the first places I'd want to visit—but I'd go in the daylight. I certainly wouldn't choose two o'clock in the morning to look at it!"

Wendy yawned, sleepy now. She noted that the Lindsley sedan was parked in its accustomed place, by the side of the Inn. "Everyone but Steve must be here," she decided, and went back to her room.

The hotel was very quiet. Wendy dropped off to sleep, five minutes after her head touched her pillow.

CHAPTER XVI

MORNING TRIP

THE KITCHEN of Edgewater Inn next morning was electric with a supercharged atmosphere.

Sarah was in a monumental rage.

Wendy had just entered, her eyes still heavy-lidded with drowsiness, when Sarah greeted her with an outburst.

"Some low, mean person stole all our cream and eggs and butter out of the refrigerator, and took all the packages of crackers and about four dozen cans of vegetables and fruit and all the cereal!" Her eyes narrowed in anger. "This time Joe Sullivan is goin' to find out who the thief is, or there's goin' to be a new cop in Cottey, I can tell you!"

"What a shame!" Wendy cried. "I'll run right over to the grocery for you. Have you a list of what we need right away?"

"Duke's already gone. Should be back by now," Sarah told her. "This is just about the last straw, young lady. Yer goin' to have to get me some padlocks today. I'm not goin' to have

sneak-thieves gettin' away with this in *my* kitchen."

She emphasized her angry remarks by brandishing a skillet.

"Do you have any idea of how much stuff was taken?" Wendy asked, worriedly.

"At least thirty dollars worth," Sarah answered. "I can make an exact list because I know just where all the boxes and cans were."

"I know—you're so efficient, Sarah."

The woman's dour features softened a little, as she gave the girl a grateful look. "This worries you, too," she said with quick understanding.

Wendy nodded. "It's not only a nuisance—it's an actual loss which certainly won't help to balance the budget."

Duke burst through the screen door, his arms laden with packages.

"There's more stuff in the car," he said. "Why don't you help me carry it in, Wendy?"

"Say, you got around early!" the girl exclaimed. "I didn't think you or Steve would be up until noon—" She paused, and her tone changed. "You and Steve didn't borrow these groceries for a picnic on the Island last night, did you?"

"What are you talking about?" Duke demanded. "We didn't go to the Island! Steve

said he'd like to see it again, but it wouldn't be any fun to go when it was dark."

Wendy stuck to her guns. "But you did go, Duke! I heard your boat, and came down to the porch. Then I saw you streaking for the Island about two o'clock this morning!"

Duke, his face baffled and unbelieving, muttered, "You bring in the rest of the groceries. I've got to go have a look at my boat—"

Miss Abbott came to the kitchen door to report that the new guests were coming down for breakfast, and the puzzling events of the night were forgotten as the staff in the kitchen swung into morning duties.

Duke stalked into the dining room about ten minutes later. He made no attempt to keep his message to Wendy a secret. "Somebody did use my motor boat last night—the gas tank is bone dry. They must have rowed back!"

"Really?"

"You can ask Steve—" The excited boy turned to his friend at the breakfast table. "Wendy believes we went out to the Island about two o'clock this morning, because she heard my motor boat. Tell her I brought you back to the hotel before midnight."

"I believe you, Duke!" Wendy said hastily.

"But I did see your boat headed toward the Island, and naturally I thought it was you!"

Their animated voices had attracted the attention of everyone in the dining room.

"The Island?" Lieutenant-Commander Neff inquired. "Oh, yes! I remember seeing it as we came in last evening. What's out there?"

"Just a deserted summer home," Wendy explained. "It hasn't been lived in for several years. But the Island is a favorite picnic spot for all Cottey."

Mr. Troy, the intelligent-faced man who Steve Booth had said was with the Bureau of Aeronautics, exchanged a significant glance with the older officer. "Perhaps that's just the spot I've been looking for, Neff. Why don't we run out and look it over, before we go on to Green Bay?"

"I would like to see it again," Steve added. "It's a beautiful place and I've got some gay memories of it."

"Young man, could you rent a motor launch large enough to accommodate all of us?" The older officer turned to Duke.

"Sure thing, sir. Jim Lundeen has an old cruiser he uses for sight-seeing parties, and he'd be tickled silly at the chance. It seats nine or ten comfortably."

"Fine! Please make the arrangements." The

man looked at the neat watch on his wrist. "Nine o'clock, say?"

Duke nodded.

The Reverend Ebermeyer had been listening to the conversation. "Gentlemen, I'd be more than pleased to have you be my guests on the little excursion, in return for the privilege of accompanying you."

The lieutenant-commander's jaw hardened, but his voice was coolly courteous as he replied, "Very kind of you, I'm sure. But this is just a little pleasure jaunt, and I should like to invite our hostess and her friend—" he nodded toward Eva "—to be our guests, if they'd care to come. That would fill the boat to capacity, I believe."

Wendy instantly recognized the invitation as a thinly-veiled command, and she accepted for both readily. "We'd be delighted. Our breakfast rush will be over by nine."

The Reverend Ebermeyer, his face crimson, stalked from the room. His breakfast remained untouched.

Duke telephoned Jim Lundeen and returned to the dining room to report that all arrangements had been completed, just as the Navy men and Mr. Troy and Mr. Gibson finished breakfast.

Wendy and Eva slipped away, after clearing the tables, to change into slack suits.

"My goodness, wasn't the good pastor fit to be tied? I wouldn't be surprised if he checked out today," Eva remarked.

Wendy was fastening her curls under a becoming yellow turban. "I don't care if he does—he's been such a pest to the new guests. I'm glad Lieutenant-Commander Neff snubbed him."

Eva giggled. "So am I! If he hadn't, we wouldn't have been taken along on this excursion!"

The girls scurried down to the lobby just before nine. Duke was waiting for them.

"The others have gone down to the dock," he reported. "Do you know what our friend Ebermeyer had the nerve to do? Said he and Mr. Schmidt would like to run over to the Island this morning, it being such a lovely day, and would I rent my motor boat to him! And he actually offered me ten bucks!"

"No fooling?" Wendy exclaimed. "Why do you suppose he's so anxious to go along? What did you tell him?"

"I told him the gas tank was empty because someone had borrowed my boat last night without asking my permission. He offered to fill it up—or even use it as a row boat!"

"Gee whiz!" Eva exploded in unaccustomed slang. "He wants to get there in the worst way!"

Both Wendy and Duke laughed at Eva's unconscious humor. "Then what did you say?" Wendy asked.

"I told him I didn't care to have it used until I'd checked it over thoroughly. While he watched, I went down and padlocked it, then took the oars and locked 'em in my car!"

"He's certain to leave after that," Wendy observed. There was no regret in her voice.

"He and Mr. Schmidt set out for Cottey in Schmidt's limousine, going at a fast clip," Duke went on. "I'll bet they've gone down to the town dock to try to rent another motor boat."

"Good! Here comes Jim Lundeen's boat now. I hope we get to the Island first!" And Wendy led the way in a race to the Edgewater Inn dock.

CHAPTER XVII

STRANGERS ON THE ISLAND

SKIPPER LUNDEEN had the true sailor's dislike of motors.

"Why didn't you kids ask for the yawl?" he demanded as Wendy, Duke and Eva scrambled aboard. The others had already taken places on the worn leather seats in the stern of the old cruiser. "This breeze is just right for a snappy sail."

"You know we'd much rather," Wendy assured him quickly, "but our distinguished visitors are in a hurry. Duke didn't think you'd mind using the launch for a quick run out to the Island."

The weather-beaten skipper was a little mollified. "That's quite a boat they've got," he remarked, nodding admiringly at the big Navy scouting plane.

"Oh, dear!" Wendy exclaimed. "You know, we forgot about breakfast for those men on board!" She turned to Steve, in the seat back of them. "Steve, we forgot breakfast for the men on the plane!"

The young ensign chuckled. "Don't let it worry you, Wendy! They're probably enjoying the luxury of a late sleep. And they can have an early lunch in Green Bay. Besides, if they get too hungry, they can make a spot of coffee and open a couple of tins of emergency rations."

"Good!" Wendy smiled in quick relief, her eyes twinkling.

The old cruiser cut through the lake waters at a respectable rate of speed.

Wendy looked back over her shoulder at the town of Cottey. There was no sign of another craft, carrying Schmidt and Ebermeyer. A few snipe boats were racing off shore, and there were several drifting fishing boats, but no other motor shattered the quiet of the bright summer morning on the water.

Wendy breathed deeply of the refreshing air. It was a glorious day to be out on the lake.

"I don't blame you for wanting to make hotel managing your career," Eva said, breaking in unexpectedly on Wendy's reverie. "You may not make much money this summer, but you certainly haven't had many dull moments."

"That's right."

Jim Lundeen gunned the motor, rounding into the bay of the Island.

Wendy gasped.

"There's smoke coming out of the chimney!" she cried. "Someone's at the lodge!"

It was a shock, after thinking of the Island as uninhabited for so many years, to see signs of life in the deserted building.

"No boat, though," Jim Lundeen observed, laconically.

"How could anyone get here without a boat?" Eva asked. "It's certainly too far to swim!"

"Don't like the looks of it," the skipper grunted. "Got no business movin' in on state's property. Trespassin'."

He brought his boat alongside the dock in a smooth, characteristic flourish.

Duke had been eyeing the lodge intently. "There they go!" he yelled. "Let's chase 'em!"

Two figures had dashed across the veranda and were crashing into the wild growth of bushes and foliage on the hill at the rear of the cluster of buildings.

Jim Lundeen had jumped to the dock at Duke's heels. "You girls stay here. Don't let the boat get away, Wendy!"

Steve joined the pursuit and the older men stared at the running trio in astonishment.

Quickly, Wendy explained that the two men who were trying to escape had no business to be camping out in the lodge. "They may be just

tramps—but on the other hand, they may be desperate criminals. Armed, or something," she added, worriedly.

Lieutenant-Commander Neff produced a small, wicked-looking gun. His jaw hardened again, and Wendy understood the steel-like strength that had made him a leader among men.

"Come on," he said to the others, "let's do what we can to help."

He shot once into the air as a warning, and the two fleeing men stopped. Seeing themselves hopelessly outnumbered, they waited docilely for Steve, Duke and Jim Lundeen to come up to them.

The Navy men waited on the dock.

Wendy noted that Lieutenant-Commander Davidson had a gun in his hand, too.

As they drew near, Wendy realized that the two interlopers were strangers. Their faces were sullen, under closely-cropped hair. She guessed their ages at about thirty, and observed that their cheap cotton coveralls were torn and soiled.

Jim Lundeen was questioning them, as they strode across the sandy beach to the dock. Neither man would answer.

"They won't talk," the skipper announced, in exasperation. "How did you fellows get here?" he demanded. "Where's your boat?"

Defiantly, the two men stood in front of the officers, staring down at their feet.

"What are your names?" Lieutenant-Commander Neff asked in a stern voice.

No answer.

"Don't you understand English?" he barked. "For the last time, what are your names?"

The men shook their heads.

Jim Lundeen threw his shapeless old yachting cap to the dock in disgust. "Well, I'll be a hornswoggled toad! They can't speak English!"

Wendy said eagerly, "Miss Abbott, at the Inn, speaks German and French. And a smattering of Italian. Maybe she could get them to talk."

"We'll take 'em to her," Neff decided. "Want to look over the Island, Troy, before we go back?"

The man in the business suit said, "No, I can tell from here it wouldn't do. Not large enough, and too rough and hilly."

"And you, Ensign Booth?" The corners of the older officer's mouth crinkled into a little smile. "Enough look-see for old time's sake?"

Steve grinned. "This isn't much like I'd remembered it. Our picnics were always pretty quiet and uneventful."

"Duke, hadn't you better run back to the Lodge and put out that fire, before we leave?" Wendy suggested.

"Good idea," Jim Lundeen praised.

Steve volunteered to go along, so the two boys raced off across the sloping beach.

Less than five minutes later they returned, their arms filled with packages.

Duke was grinning over the big boxes he carried. "Here's Sarah's canned goods, Wendy! And Steve's got the cereal and butter and eggs."

"I'll bet they're the ones who took your boat, too!" Wendy exclaimed.

"But how did it get back and tie itself up at the Edgewater dock?" Duke puffed, as he stowed the packages into the cruiser.

Wendy looked again at the stolid-faced men, watching apathetically.

"Perhaps Miss Abbott can pry that secret from them," she said. "They had to have help—and it's my guess that the person who helped them knows where Sarah keeps the canned goods."

CHAPTER XVIII

NEWS STORY

IT WAS a silent group of passengers in Jim Lundeen's old cruiser, returning to Edgewater Inn.

There was something almost sinister in the quiet stolidness of the two strangers. Wendy's observant eyes had quickly noted the weathered look of their torn clothing; the countless scratches on their scuffed shoes.

As Wendy covertly studied their downcast faces on the brief trip back from the Island, she sighed. Miss Abbott might have difficulty getting any information from this pair. They looked as if they were accustomed to hardship. Perhaps even cruelty couldn't crack their tough resistance.

Miss Abbott was sitting at the desk in the lobby when the group came in. Wendy saw that the veranda was deserted. There were no signs of the other guests at the Inn. Swiftly she explained about the strangers.

"*Parlez-vous Francais?*" the older woman asked in her well-modulated tones. The two men refused to look up.

"Italian?" she surmised tentatively. After a pause, she said, "*Chi tace acconsente.*" Still no flicker of response. "That's Italian for 'He who is silent consents,' " she explained.

Abruptly she stood up, extending her arm stiffly. "Heil Hitler!"

Automatically, the two men clicked their heels, stiffened to a military stance, and returned the salute and greeting in unison.

"I should have thought of that immediately," she remarked to the circle around the desk. To the two strangers she said, an unmistakable note of sarcasm in her voice, "*Grosse Seelen dulden still.*"

"What does that mean?" Duke blurted, his curiosity getting the better of him.

"It means 'Great souls suffer in silence.' " Miss Abbott sighed. "I shouldn't be cynical, but I saw so much of this ridiculous racial arrogance during the last war—"

Abruptly, she turned to the magazine rack at the side of the desk. "I think I know who these men are. Just a moment."

Rapidly, she leafed through several newspapers. "Here we are—this news story was in the Journal day before yesterday." In her clear voice she read:

" 'Port Arthur, Canada: Two German aviators

made a successful escape from an internment camp at an undisclosed place in this province yesterday by means of a clever ruse.

'Five hundred prisoners were taken, under guard, to see a polo game in the exercise grounds near the camp barracks. In the excitement of the game, and surrounded by helpful fellow prisoners, the two men managed to half-bury themselves in the loose dirt of a ditch.

'Their absence was not discovered until the game was over and the prisoners were counted on their return to the camp. By the time guards returned to the site of the game, the prisoners had made good their escape.

'It is more than two hundred miles to the United States border, with wild, marshy ground and forests between. Unless the Germans had outside assistance, they will experience great difficulty in reaching safety, directors of the camp believe.

'Officials are investigating the report of nearby residents that flashes of light were seen last night in the vicinity. It is believed that accomplices may have been signalling the escaped prisoners. This brings the total of escapes from Canadian prison camps to twelve since the beginning of the war. Eight have been re-captured.' "

"Thank you, Miss Abbott," Lieutenant-Com-

mander Neff said, with genuine admiration. "I believe you have solved our little mystery."

"What will you do with them?" Wendy asked.

The officer considered. "I believe the best thing to do would be to take them to Green Bay with us and turn them over to the FBI. They can check with the proper Canadian authorities. The men will probably be returned to the same internment camp."

"I admit complete defeat," the quiet Mr. Gibson said to the officer. "You win, Neff. Cottey is much too close to the Canadian border for our new factory. Let us get on to Green Bay."

The Lieutenant-Commander chuckled. "I regret it, too, Gibson. I'd like to have some excuse to get back often, for more of Miss Wendy's warm hospitality and excellent food."

Wendy flashed the officer one of her winning smiles. "We'd be delighted to have you again without a business excuse. You have been the most exciting and satisfactory guests we've had this summer."

CHAPTER XIX

DECISION

DUKE, EVA and Wendy watched from the dock as the mammoth Navy bird took off with a tremendous roar from its powerful motors.

Wendy said thoughtfully, "I do wish Miss Abbott had been able to get some hint of the people who helped those Germans get to the Island. I'm sure it must have been some of our other guests."

Unexpectedly, it was Eva who said, "Weren't the Pattons and Lindsley and Thompson gone all that day? They would have had plenty of time to get to Canada and back."

"Eva! They were home, too, when I heard the boat, because I noticed Lindsley's car parked at the side of the Inn!"

"And the Pattons are from Canada, aren't they?" Duke asked.

"It'll be hard to prove, but I think we should keep our eyes open—"Wendy was saying, when two large cars rolled into the Edgewater Inn's drive. The trio of friends raced from the dock back to their duties at the hotel.

The newly-arrived tourists were two families of four each, traveling together. They engaged four rooms on the first floor, and Wendy scurried happily about the dining room, pleased with the rush of new business. If they liked it at Edgewater Inn, she thought, they might stay for the whole of their vacation.

The unexpected spurt in business taxed the entire staff of the establishment working in the kitchen and dining room, so no one caught a glimpse of the furtive figure slipping into one of the first-floor rooms late in the afternoon, gingerly carrying an odd-shaped package.

But everyone learned the results an hour later.

Most of the guests had gathered on the veranda, as was the nightly custom, to watch the flaming sunset. One of the young mothers in the party took her three-year old son, excused herself early, and went off to bed.

It was her terrified shrieking a few moments later which shattered the after-dinner calm.

Wendy, still busy in the dining room, raced to the door of the reception lobby in time to see the frightened mother, clutching her sobbing child, reach the veranda.

"Tommy!" she cried to her husband. "We've got to get out of here this minute! There's a snake in Sonny's bed!"

"No!" Wendy moaned helplessly. "There couldn't be! I've never seen a snake here—even outdoors!"

The young mother turned to face the girl, her eyes blazing wildly. "You can see for yourself! I turned down the covers and there it was, coiled ready to strike!"

Wendy, staggered at this latest blow, leaned weakly against the desk. "Duke," she appealed, "I can't look. Would you go see if it's true?"

"Sure." The boy strode to the cleaning closet on the first floor hall and seized a broom.

Wendy waited an age, watching the open door of the bedroom where he had disappeared, with agonized eyes. He returned a moment later with a small garter snake suspended over the broom handle. He was grinning.

"It must have been a shock, Ma'am," he said, "but your little boy wasn't in any danger, really."

"But, Duke! That snake didn't get there by itself!" Wendy objected. "Someone put it there deliberately!"

"Tommy, you'll have to pack," the young woman said to her husband. "I couldn't bear to take Sonny back into that awful room—or go there, myself. For goodness sake be careful. Look in the bags before you close them up, to be

sure we aren't taking any of the ghastly things with us."

"I can't tell you how sorry I am that this happened," Wendy told the woman shakily. "I do hope your little boy can forget his unpleasant experience quickly."

The woman went out the door without speaking. The others of her group went to their rooms and returned in a few minutes with their luggage.

"Wait until Lester Savage hears about *this*," Wendy murmured to Duke. He had disposed of the snake, washed the broom handle, and was now returning it to the cleaning closet.

"What are you talking about?"

Swiftly, Wendy told the boy about the banker's conversation with her uncle that morning.

Duke laughed shortly. "You haven't seen him about any time today, have you?"

"No. Sarah threatened to give him rat poison if he turned up—he told Uncle Ed he'd heard the food was no good here!"

"If you'd seen him around, there might be some explanation for a snake's being in that bed. But no garter snake crawled in there from choice. It couldn't have been accidentally picked up from the ground on the sheet, could it?"

"And put through the mangle?" Wendy asked

scornfully. "Not even Mamie Boggs could have missed it—and I think Sarah did all the mangling this week, anyway."

"I just hope none of the others start seeing things," Duke added, nodding significantly at the guests still on the veranda.

"I shouldn't be surprised at anything," Wendy declared wearily.

Early the following morning another group of vacationers took the same set of rooms.

This time Wendy went to the rooms with them, and examined everything thoroughly with her quick, observant eyes. The rooms seemed to be in perfect order.

"Now, if the other guests will kindly refrain from telling them about the robberies, the snakes, and the salt in the food—we may be able to keep them overnight," Wendy observed to Sarah. "But it's probably too much to hope for."

"I'm worried about your Uncle Ed," Sarah replied gloomily. "I didn't tell him about the snake, or he'd probably have called Lester Savage that minute, and accepted his offer."

"Maybe he'll feel better if we can keep those newcomers comfortable and not lose any of the old timers. The Schmidts seem to be fairly well settled, and there aren't any signs of the Alexan-

ders or the Pattons or the Ebermeyers being concerned over last night's affair."

That evening at dinner Miss Abbott motioned imperiously to Wendy from the doorway of the dining room. She had formed the valuable habit of watching the desk in the reception room while Wendy was busy with her other duties.

"Wendy, my dear," she said, "the water has been running for a long time in that bathroom between the front first-floor rooms. It had been on so long that I decided to see if any of the new party was in the dining room, so they could investigate and see if anything was wrong. And they're all eating—all nine of them!"

"Then they must have left the bath tub faucets running!"

Even as they talked, a dark rivulet darted out from beneath the closed door and stained the hall carpet.

"You tell them while I open the door!" Wendy called, reaching for the pass keys in the desk drawer.

Miss Abbott, smooth and unruffled as always, sped on her errand.

More than half the bedroom rug was sopping wet, and the spot was spreading in a hug fan. The bathroom floor was under a half-inch of

water. More was spattering down from the full tub. Wendy splashed recklessly across the miniature pool and pulled the plug and turned off the faucets in split-second gestures.

Miss Abbott and Duke rushed into the room, with Mr. Eberle, one of the new guests, at their heels. He still carried his napkin.

"What a mess!" Duke cried.

"At least, it didn't get to the Missus' suitcase!" the man exclaimed.

"Who left it running?" Wendy asked, exasperated and despairing. "I'm afraid it's ruined the carpet, and it might warp the bathroom floor."

"We didn't do it. It must have been broken," Mr. Eberle said defensively. "We decided there wasn't time to bathe before dinner, so no one turned the tub on. We got back from our sightseeing ride too late this afternoon."

"You must have," Wendy insisted. "The plug was in and both faucets were turned on full."

"But we didn't." Mr. Eberle was losing his temper. "Mrs. Eberle was complaining that we'd spent so much time wandering around in Bluff Park that we didn't get back in time to bathe before dinner. You can ask her—or anyone else in our party. She was still fussing about it when we sat down at the dinner table just now."

Sarah appeared in the door, her arms loaded

with old towels and a mop-bucket. Without a word she dropped to her knees and started to blot at the soaked carpet.

"You can see for yourself," Duke said, in quick anger, "that the faucets aren't even dripping. And they couldn't have turned on by themselves."

Mr. Eberle threw his napkin down on the floor and stomped across the wet carpet to the luggage holder. His face was purple with wrath. He slammed his wife's toilet articles recklessly from the dressing table into one of the open bags.

"We're getting out of this mad-house," he declared. "I won't stay here and be called a liar!"

"It's all right," Wendy wailed. "We'll put you in another dry room if you like!"

"Nothin' doin'! We're gettin' out right now!"

He slapped the bags shut, grabbed several coats, and slammed out of the room, while Wendy, Miss Abbott and Sarah looked on. He was still sputtering angrily. Duke stood in the hall, visibly controlling his temper with great effort.

"I'm sorry," he finally muttered to Wendy, "but I still say that water couldn't turn itself on."

Sarah looked up from her scrubbing. "Wendy, mebbe you'd better go see your uncle and tell him to take that offer."

Wendy couldn't help it. This second mishap

in less than twenty-four hours had been too much, and the tears ran unchecked down her cheeks.

Miss Abbott threw a comforting arm around her shoulder. "You run to your room and wash your face, darling, after you've had a good cry. We all realize what a disappointment this must be for you."

Wendy fled.

An hour later, rested and all signs of the tears washed away, she went to her uncle's room.

"Sarah has already told me what she said to you," Uncle Ed told her gravely. "I've had time to think it over. If we sell the hotel now, you can have one year of your college course, at least."

Wendy gave him a tremulous smile of gratitude, but she shook her head. "No, Uncle Ed. We can't give up our home."

"I've thought of that. I can live in my workshop while you're at school."

"But what about Sarah?"

"She wouldn't have any trouble finding other work," the man answered a little sadly. "We've never paid her full value for what she's done for us—"

"But she'd be lost without us—just as we'd be lost without her," Wendy protested. "It's too much of a sacrifice to ask. I couldn't take it, Uncle Ed."

"If I weren't such a helpless, hopeless old fool!" the man burst out brokenly. "I'd like to do so much for you, Wendy—and I can't even take care of myself properly!"

"That's not true!" Wendy was shocked. It was the first complaint she'd ever heard from her uncle. "You've managed to keep us all comfortably for ten whole years! I'm the one to blame for wanting more! No, Uncle Ed. Let's stick it out. We've had bad luck these first weeks, but it's still early in the season. I'm sure we can break even, repay the loan and save the hotel. Let's not give in!"

CHAPTER XX

THE BLUE PAPERS

THE BULKY packages of new sheets, pillow-cases, towels and curtains started to arrive the next morning.

Wendy managed to forget her worries for a time, as she worked.

She had seen Lindsley and Thompson, the two men from Brooklyn, leaving early in their battered old sedan. She took a pair of the fresh curtains and went to their room, letting herself in with a pass key.

It was an odd-looking room for summer vacationists, she thought. No swimming suits, or sports clothes in evidence. Just two closed, small suit-cases. They had chosen one of the least expensive rooms without a closet, and the hooks back of the door held two shabby top-coats.

Wendy had hung the new curtains, and folded the old torn ones into a neat bundle before her quick eyes caught the thin line of blue along the edge of the carpet. Impulsively she investigated. She tugged at the tough blue paper.

She stared incredulously at her find.

She was holding blue-prints from the Brooklyn Navy Yard—intricate, complicated plans for turbines and gear-reductions!

Horrified, she stared at the white lines and tracings. What were these papers doing, hidden under a carpet at Edgewater Inn? Why would Lindsley and Thompson have these blue-prints, obviously the secret property of the United States Navy, with them on a vacation trip in Wisconsin?

The tremendous signficance of the discovery was overwhelming, and Wendy scarcely dared think of it. With trembling fingers she replaced the papers.

She was just in time.

There were steps in the hall. She could hear men's voices, growing louder as they approached.

Impulsively she snatched the old curtains and her pass key, and rolled under the bed. It was the only possible hiding place in that tiny box of room.

A key scratched in the lock and Lindsley and Thompson walked into the room. Mr. Schmidt was with them, for Wendy recognized his voice. He was asking, "How many of the radios will you need?"

"About four." It was Lindsley who replied. Wendy had noticed that he appeared to be

spokesman for the pair. "We could use more, but another one or two would make us too conspicuous."

"Will that be enough to do the damage?" Schmidt's oily voice was secretive and threatening.

"Sure. Besides, we know where to toss a handful of sand where it will do the most good!" Lindsley laughed mirthlessly. "When do you want the blue-prints?"

Wendy almost gasped. If Schmidt wanted the plans, now, she'd be discovered! They were under the carpet, just beyond the edge of the bed. Anyone who stooped to get them would be sure to glimpse her white uniform as she huddled in her dangerous hiding place.

She held her breath until she heard Schmidt's considered reply. "No. You'd better keep them, for the present. We'll run no risk after next week. I've made an offer to buy the hotel, and we'll get rid of those snoopy, curious kids."

So Schmidt was the mysterious buyer who wanted Edgewater Inn!

In a blinding flash of understanding, Wendy realized the pattern back of all the mishaps that had occurred at the hotel. It was all part of a plan to discourage her; to force her uncle to the decision to sell Edgewater Inn.

Because of her amazement at this sudden knowledge, Wendy missed part of the conversation in the room. When she listened again, Lindsley was saying, "—a relief to get rid of that hatchet-faced nurse, too. One of these fine mornings she's going to get conscious and remember where she saw me before."

"Well—come along to my room and check those radios," Schmidt ordered.

The three men left. Wendy forced herself to wait under the bed for five minutes. Then she rolled out, straightened her mussed hair, picked up the old curtains, and left the room.

The halls were empty.

Resolutely, she went in search of Miss Abbott.

She found the nurse at the desk in the reception lobby, studying the grocery lists.

"Miss Abbott," she began urgently, "have you ever been able to remember where you saw Lindsley before?"

A troubled look came into the woman's eyes. "No. I've puzzled and puzzled, Wendy. I've found him looking at me in a strange way several times. It's very embarrassing. It must have been several years ago that I first knew him, and I simply can't recall where it was."

"Do try to remember," Wendy begged. "Could it have been during the first World War,

do you think? When you were nursing for the Red Cross?"

"It could have been," Miss Abbott confessed. "I'll try to concentrate on it. It may come to me suddenly."

"I've got to run along and find Uncle Ed," Wendy said, excusing herself. "I've discovered something pretty important—I'll tell you later."

"Something about Lindsley?" Miss Abbott demanded, but Wendy had already whisked through the door to the court.

The girl took the path to her uncle's workshop, chuckling at her absent-mindedness when she realized she was still carrying the old curtains from Lindsley's room.

She knocked on the door of the workshop, but there was no response. Puzzled, she went around to the wide window and looked inside. There was no sign of her uncle's presence. His tools and work-board were neatly in place on the shelf inside.

"He's always here," Wendy pondered. "What could have happened to him?"

She raced back to the hotel, taking the path to the kitchen door.

Mamie Boggs was sitting on the stool at the sink, peeling potatoes. She lifted her stolid face when Wendy banged the screen door.

"Where's Sarah?"

"Don't know. She took your uncle somewheres in his wheel-chair. She'd better get back to put the meat loaf in the oven, or it won't get done for lunch."

"You do it," Wendy told her, rushing on through the pantry into the dining room.

Sarah had taken Uncle Ed out in his wheel-chair!

They were already on the way to the bank, then, to accept the offer to purchase Edgewater Inn!

Wildly, Wendy thought of ways to stop them before all was lost.

Eva was setting tables for lunch.

"You've got to go to the bank!" Wendy burst out when she saw her.

"Why?"

"I'm afraid Sarah has taken Uncle Ed to the bank to sell Edgewater Inn! They can't do it! Eva, run as fast as you can and tell them I've found out who's trying to buy the hotel! And he can't have it!"

She raced on to find Duke. He was down at the dock, tinkering with the motor on his boat.

"Duke! Take your jaloppy and go to Lester Savage's house. Stop Sarah and Uncle Ed! I'm afraid they've gone to sell Edgewater Inn, and

they can't do it. I've found out who's trying to buy it."

"I saw 'em leave," Duke volunteered. "They were on their way toward town, all right. Who wants to buy the hotel?"

"I'll tell you all about it later. It's terribly serious, Duke. Do hurry and stop them! My goodness, but I do hope it's not too late. Eva's on her way to the bank. I'm afraid Lester Savage may have gone home for lunch. Sarah and Uncle Ed would follow him, and they'd go there. Hurry, Duke!"

CHAPTER XXI

MRS. ALEXANDER'S TEARS

WENDY REMAINED a moment on the dock after Duke hurried away, trying to decide the next move.

Mr. Schmidt and Mr. Alexander left the hotel and drove away in the Schmidt sedan while Wendy watched.

"That settles it," Wendy resolved. "I'll go hang fresh curtains in both their rooms while they're out, and see what I can see—"

Whistling airily, as if she hadn't a care or worry in the world, Wendy strode down the corridor with her bundle of new curtains. She inserted her pass key in the Alexander door and swung it open.

Mrs. Alexander was stretched out on the bed, weeping and sobbing uncontrollably.

Wendy blushed. "Oh, I'm sorry—I didn't even think of knocking. I saw your husband leaving—"

The young woman managed to sit up on the bed, mopping at her eyes. "It's all right," she

said, brokenly. "Really, it is. Besides, I must talk to you—I must talk to someone!"

Wendy closed the door softly. She dropped the fresh curtains on a chair, then crossed the room to a small stand. She poured a drink of water for the weeping woman and held it out to her. Then she poured fresh, cool water into the old-fashioned basin, and doused a small towel in it.

"Please wash your face with this. It'll make you feel better, I'm sure."

"You're so good to me!" Mrs. Alexander breathed after she'd managed to control her crying. "It is good to know that there are still some warm hearts in the world."

Wendy patted her awkwardly on the shoulder. "What was it you wanted to tell me? Perhaps, you'll feel better if you talk about your troubles."

The woman looked at the girl with tragic eyes. "I'll tell you. But there is nothing you can do to help me except keep my secret. I am a Czech. I met my husband at a music festival in Bohemia—I know English and he wanted me to come to the beautiful America with him. I did not know that he had studied many years in Germany and that he was a Nazi. Even then, he was planning to help them get our poor little country. We did not suspect!"

"That's odd," Wendy said thoughtfully. "The Bogg sisters—the chambermaid and the woman who works in the kitchen—are Bohemian, and so is Mrs. Schmidt!"

Mrs. Alexander's large eyes flashed with sudden hatred. "They lie to you! They are German, too. But they spy on me. They know I do not like what Harry is doing—" She rose swiftly, clutching Wendy's arm. "You will not tell this?" she demanded.

"I promise," Wendy vowed. "I realize you are telling me because you recognize a friend—and that you cannot contain it another moment."

"That is right. But it is so important that you do not talk. My people are still in Bohemia, you understand, and the *gestapo*—they are everywhere!" She took a deep, sobbing breath. "Even Harry has warned me. If I talk, they will kill my old father and mother! So—I cannot tell you the terrible things I know. My parents are helpless. So am I. But I had to tell it to someone."

Wendy patted Mrs. Alexander's shoulder again. "It sounds rather bad. I don't know what I could do to help you—"

"Oh, you must not try!" the woman cried in an agonized voice. "You have helped me so much, just by listening! But, please—do not try to stop them! They are ruthless!"

"Well, in that case," Wendy stated in a practical, matter-of-fact voice, "I'd better get on with my curtain hanging."

"Let me do it!" the woman cried eagerly. "I am half-wild with nothing to do but think and worry."

"Swell! I'm a little late with my work this morning—" Wendy took two curtains from her bundle and handed them to Mrs. Alexander. "I'll be back later to get the old ones."

She slipped through the door.

Wendy looked down the corridor toward the central stairs. Someone had just gone around the corner. She could see a shadow on the wall. Had someone been listening to Mrs. Alexander's outburst? Wendy was positive she had caught a little noise in the hall. That's why she had chopped off the poor woman's confidences so abruptly; why she had accepted her offer to hang the curtains so eagerly.

Wendy raced toward the stairs.

Jennie Boggs had just reached the central reception hall.

"Jennie!" Wendy called.

The sullen-faced woman turned. "What d'ye want?"

"Go to the kitchen and help your sister prepare lunch," Wendy ordered. "Sarah is out."

With an inward sign of relief, Wendy glimpsed Miss Abbott's neat figure at the desk. "Miss Abbott, would you mind supervising in the kitchen until Sarah gets back? Jennie's going to help Mamie with the lunch."

Jennie Boggs gave Wendy a resentful look, full of hatred. But she accepted the girl's order without a word.

"Of course," Miss Abbott was saying. "I'll be glad to, Wendy."

Wendy marched toward the south wing, the fresh curtains under one arm, and the pass key clutched in her hand. She wanted no eavesdropping and no counter-spying, when she investigated Mr. Schmidt's room—the one with the high line!

CHAPTER XXII

FORTY RADIOS

WHAT WOULD be back of that door?

Wendy wouldn't have been too surprised to see cobras, wild animals or a victim in chains, but she certainly wasn't prepared for the astonishing sight which confronted her when the door was unlocked and opened.

There were forty small portable radios in the room, stacked high on the floor and even under the bed. And they were just alike! All were Model Twelve Zephyrs, the bewildered girl noted.

Next to the window was an instrument panel which Wendy recognized as a small radio transmission and receiving set.

"So that's why they wanted the high line!" Wendy exclaimed. Curiously, she moved across the room to the instrument panel.

Fascinated, and almost without thinking, Wendy snapped the switch marked "ON," and slipped the earphones over her bright hair.

"Yess, Schmidt?" a guttural voice said. "You signalled?"

In panic, Wendy tore the receivers from her ears and snapped the set off.

Good heavens, what had she done?

Then, she heard approaching footsteps in the hall.

She took a step toward the bed, intending to hide under it, when she remembered the radios. Frenziedly, she ducked into the doubtful safety of the tiny closet. There weren't even any clothes in it to hide behind.

Through the keyhole Wendy could see most of the small room. It was crowded because Schmidt had brought the men from Brooklyn, Bob Patton and Harry Alexander, and the Reverend Ebermeyer with him.

"Everything is in readiness," Schmidt was saying in his most authoritative manner. "Are you prepared for your orders?"

"Heil, Hitler!" Lindsley exclaimed.

"Heil, Hitler!" the others chorused.

All were standing with hands uplifted in the Nazi salute which had become familiar to Wendy, through the many movies and newspaper pictures she'd seen of similar incidents. She gazed unbelievingly. Could this actually be happening at the Edgewater Inn in Wisconsin?

"Goot!" Schmidt gave a deep sigh of satisfac-

tion. "Then I vill give a demonstration of how to work this radio bomb."

Wendy shuddered. That mystery was cleared up—each of the small radios contained a bomb!

"They are disconnected now. All you need to do is to twist these two wires together at the back —see?"

The men nodded.

"Then you set the dial at sixty and the clock will start. The bombs will go up sixty minutes later—see how simple we made it? Dial at sixty and you have sixty minutes to get away."

"Clever! Ver-ee clever!" the minister praised. "It's a little out of my line but even I can understand it!"

"You, Ebermeyer, vill take twenty to your headquarters in Chicago for distribution. I vill send the orders in code over a pay-telephone thiss eveing."

Wendy, recovering a bit from her first shock, noted that Schmidt was talking more brokenly now in his excitement.

"You, Lindsley and Thompson, know your jobs. It iss fortunate that Thompson once worked on the Superior docks. He vill know his vay to the most important loading cranes and the ship-building vorks. You vill haf plenty of time to get to the Coast Guard station in Duluth, and ve haf de-

cided on thiss time, because there vill be a training ship and three cutters in. You vill be expected to get them!"

"Heil Hitler!" Lindsley cried again. His face was flushed with emotion.

"And my job?" Harry Alexander's voice was trembling.

Wendy could see him gnawing nervously at his lower lip and looking more rabbity and scared than ever.

"You, Alexander, will take your bombs to the Essengee factory in Green Bay. They have been given a large order for airplane instruments—which they won't be able to fill!" Schmidt chuckled evilly.

"That leaves the government radio station for me," Patton remarked.

"Right. Our little set vill be no longer troubled with *that* interference." Schmidt rubbed his hands together. "Ve haf vaited long for thiss chance!"

"What time?" Lindsley demanded.

"Six o'clock in the morning," Schmidt answered. "You see—even the time is easy. Six o'clock—set the dials at sixty—and sixty minutes later there vill be forty big noises!"

Wendy clenched her fists into tight knots. If only they would leave now!

If she could get away undiscovered, she could stop this wholesale destruction!

The terrific importance of the plot she'd just heard staggered and numbed her. Her worries over Edgewater Inn seemed dwarfed into insignificance in comparison—yet they were closely linked, she realized.

She peeked through the keyhole again to see if there were any signs of the men leaving.

They were cautiously making separate stacks of the portable radios. "I'll wait until you all get yours," the minister was saying, "and I'll take the twenty that are left."

"Before we leave," Schmidt added, "I'll check on Chicago—"

He switched on the radio, fitting the ear-phones over his head. A moment later his florid face blanched.

"No! No! I did not—choost a minute!" He slipped the ear-phones from his head, and turned to the startled men in the room.

"Did any of you sneak into this room earlier and signal Chicago?"

White-faced, the men all shook their heads. "We've been with you most of the morning," Harry Alexander pointed out defensively.

Wendy knew it was a matter of seconds. She

looked around the closet desperately, but there was no way to escape. That window was too high and too small—

"Ten minutes ago someone signalled from thiss room!" Schmidt hissed.

"What did they say?" Lindsley demanded.

"Nothing. Just turned the set on. When Schimmel answered the radio went dead again. He hass been signalling ever since."

Lindsley nodded toward the closet. "Why don't you look in there? Certainly no one is hiding under the bed."

Schmidt flung open the door.

Wendy faced him defiantly, her shoulders straight. She said nothing.

"So—we have a little G-girl," Schmidt sneered. "But you didn't get away in time, did you?"

Wendy still refused to answer.

Schmidt seized her arm roughly and jerked her into the room. "Why did you come here?" he demanded.

"To hang these curtains." Wendy's voice was unexpectedly steady. "I saw all those radios and that set—and—and I knew you wouldn't want me to know why you had the highline. I'm—I'm sorry I turned on the radio set. I know I shouldn't have."

Schmidt laughed. It was a chill, unpleasant sound. "You should be sorry, you little snooper. You might have got away with it—"

"*Gott in himmel!*" Lindsley exclaimed softly. "She heard! She knows all our plans! She must die!"

Schmidt shook his head. "Not yet. Not in the daylight. Too many of her dumpkoff playmates hanging about. We'll wait until dark."

"But what will you do with her?"

Schmidt shrugged his fat shoulders. He turned to Bob Patton. "Tie her hands and feet together behind her back with those fine new curtains." He laughed again, jeeringly. "And tear off a ruffle and stuff it in her pretty little mouth. Ve must be sure she doesn't talk."

Lindsley assisted the Canadian, twisting the material mercilessly around the helpless girl's ankles and tying the ends of the curtains in hard knots. Bob Patton, carefully not looking at the white-faced, trembling girl, wadded one of the curtain tie-backs into a ball and thrust it into her mouth. He tore a hem from the top of one curtain and bound the gag in place. When she was completely trussed and gagged, they shoved her into the closet and slammed the door.

The key scraped in the lock.

Wendy heard Schmidt go back to the radio and

say: "Schimmel? It's all right about that signal you heard. Just a snoopy brat. We found her and locked her up. We'll take care of her later—tonight, after dark. Heil, Hitler!"

Wendy, listening desperately, heard the men leaving. Schmidt was apportioning the bombs. Four to Lindsley and four more to Thompson, for their assignments in Superior and Duluth; six to Alexander for the Essengee factory in Green Bay; six to Patton for the government radio station; and twenty for the Reverend Ebermeyer, for Chicago distribution—and destruction.

At last, the room was quiet.

Wendy was alone—and completely helpless.

CHAPTER XXIII

BROKEN WINDOW

STUNNED, WENDY lay helplessly in the cramped position where she'd fallen against the wall of the little closet.

She struggled a little against the tight bonds, and then gave up. Her thoughts went back to all the mishaps of the summer, viewed again through the light of this day's revelations.

She could see that her troubles had started with the arrival of the Schmidts.

Jennie Boggs and her sulky, morose sister had been in on the plot. They had appeared too conveniently. And the very first day Wendy had heard Mrs. Schmidt and Jennie talking in a foreign tongue. Of course, it had been German—not Czech.

One or the other of the Boggs sisters had put too much salt in the soup and potatoes in order to drive the other guests away. It was all so clear now! And that must have been the reason for the fake robbery of Mrs. Schmidt's pearl necklace!

The more recent difficulties—the snake in the

bed, and the flooded bathtub—had been part of a double campaign.

The purpose had been to rid the hotel of guests not in the plot, and to force Wendy, her uncle and Sarah to sell Edgewater Inn to Schmidt.

Small wonder Schmidt and Ebermeyer had been so interested in the secret conversations of the Navy flyers. And Wendy's surmise that the Pattons, Lindsley and Thompson had helped the German prisoners escape from Canada must be true.

The tight bonds were becoming increasingly uncomfortable. Wendy tried to sit up straighter. It was hot and stuffy in the little closet.

There was only one flicker of hope in her present dilemma. She was sure Mr. Schmidt had gone with the others—there had been no sound from the room since the men had left.

That meant that no one had been left on guard.

With a return of courage Wendy surveyed the closet from top to bottom. She decided that if she could manage to get the little square closet window open, she might be able to squeeze through. It was a drop of only fourteen feet to the ground.

But first she had to get loose. Again she looked over the barren closet.

Her quick eyes caught the gleaming point of a

nail about a foot from the floor. Someone had driven a nail slantingly into the wood next the door, and the sharp point was exposed.

She wiggled and squirmed and bumped across the floor. Lindsley and Patton had done their work too well, she thought angrily. It took her almost an hour to turn around and get in position to saw her bonds against the sharp point.

Once, as she worked, she heard Duke calling her name.

She worked harder, more frantically, scratching her arms recklessly as she struggled.

It was painful, heart-breaking effort. One by one, the threads of the twisted curtain were pulling apart. She was exhausted after only a few minutes of sawing now, and had to rest frequently. Perspiration poured in maddening trickles across her forehead and into her eyes.

Dusk was gathering outside before she got her right hand free.

Any moment she expected to hear the fatal steps; the voices of the men in the room on the other side of the door which would seal her doom.

As she toiled desperately, Wendy had plenty of time to realize the seriousness of the plot she had uncovered. These men wouldn't let her live. It would be risking exposure. And Schmidt had said they'd wait until it was dark—

But after she managed to free her right hand, it was just a matter of seconds to loosen the other bonds.

She reached for the window above her head, as soon as she could stand.

She couldn't open it.

No matter now, about the noise. She couldn't lose by taking any chance. Her situation was too desperate. Icy fingers of dread clamped a rigid vise around her heart.

She kicked off one of her sport pumps, and used the hard heel for a hammer. The glass shattered at the first blow.

With swift, unheeding fingers she picked out the splinters of glass around the opening and threw them on the floor. Her arms were scratched from the nail in the wall; her hands were bleeding from glass cuts.

She didn't pause to listen for noises in the room outside.

With all her strength, she pulled herself up to the opening.

If she could hang on, and not drop head first—

She pulled her head and shoulders through the small opening. Then with a quick twist of her body, she turned and sat on the sill. Still holding to the window frame, she pulled her legs on through, and hung suspended for a century-long

second. Then she released her hold on the window and dropped to the ground.

She flexed her knees as she fell, but the sting of the drop pricked at every nerve in her body, and she grabbed at the side of the building to keep from falling.

"You really didn't think you'd get away with it, did you?" an amused voice murmured into her ear.

She whirled. Hugo Krueger was standing behind her, his arms folded insolently. But Wendy, with a sinking heart, saw that one hand held a wicked-looking little black gun.

"Herr Schmidt will see you in his car," the tutor said, still smiling. "Will you come this way?"

Wendy looked frantically around the deserted court.

Couldn't anyone see her? Wouldn't anyone come to help?

"Don't keep the leader waiting," Krueger warned, all hint of amusement gone. "He doesn't like it."

Her shoulders sagging and her spirit crushed, Wendy stumbled off down the path to the garages.

CHAPTER XXIV

BLUFF PARK

"You were right, Herr Schmidt," Hugo Krueger announced, as he shoved Wendy into the rear seat of the black sedan. "She did try to escape. I let her struggle out of the window—but no further."

"Get in, Krueger."

The tutor followed the girl into the car, still holding the menacing gun.

"Drive slowly up to Bluff Park." Schmidt gave the command to the silent chauffeur, who had stolidly faced straight ahead during the entire scene.

"The Park, is it?" Krueger asked. "Not a bad idea. It is dark enough now."

The chauffeur switched on the headlights, and the powerful car moved forward slowly.

Wendy, recovering from the shock of her recapture, glanced frantically to the right and left. If she could see one friendly face, she'd cry for help—knowing it would mean certain destruc-

tion from that gleaming black revolver. At least, it would set the police looking for Schmidt. The sacrifice of her life would be unimportant if she could foil his plans.

But there was no one.

The drive and grounds of Edgewater Inn were deserted. The big car rolled onto the highway. Wendy breathed deeply of the fresh breeze sweeping in from the lake. She seemed to gain strength from it.

"Did you remember the chloroform?" Schmidt asked.

"It's in the glove compartment," Krueger replied.

"Good. We vill go to that high point above the rocks and water. After she is unconscious, we vill remove the cloth from her nose and throw her down on the rocks." Schmidt sighed. "It iss too bad to delay our start on the important mission, but it iss better to get her out of the way."

"Yes. She knows too much. It might have been better to wait until we owned the hotel—"

"Are you questioning my judgment, Krueger?"

Schmidt's tone was deceptively soft, but Wendy could feel the tutor's instinctive recoil of fear. The hand that held the gun trembled a little.

"Oh, no, Herr Schmidt! Didn't I just say you

were always right? Didn't you know that the girl would try to escape?"

"I do not feel it necessary to explain to you," Schmidt went on, heavily. "But we cannot afford to wait. We must start our sabotage immediately. Even another week would have been valuable to our enemies. Does Der Fuehrer wait to strike? No!"

"Heil Hitler!" Wendy caught the tone of fanatical admiration in Krueger's voice.

"His moves are always well-planned, too," Schmidt went on with smug satisfaction. "Everyone knows that this foolish girl was failing at her attempt to run Edgewater Inn. She was forcing her crippled uncle to the loss of the hotel—what could be more natural than for her to commit suicide?"

Wendy gasped involuntarily.

Poor Uncle Ed! And Sarah! They would spend all the rest of their lives in regret and grief, believing they had induced her suicide!

Krueger laughed, genuinely delighted. "Our enemies may try to starve our bodies, but they can never win over what we have up here!" He tapped his own forehead significantly.

"Yess, it iss a goot plan!" Schmidt burst into coarse laughter, slapping his knee. "We vill never be suspected. Her body vill not be dis-

covered before morning, we can be sure. We vill stop in several taverns on our way to Green Bay. We vill be noisy and funny, so people vill remember us—if it iss necessary to prove we were far away."

Wendy was determined to conceal her fear, but she shuddered at Schmidt's words. How could humans be so cold-blooded and cruel? Here they were, planning a deliberate murder in front of the victim. And laughing cheerfully about the gay evening ahead! Wouldn't they ever feel any remorse about the battered, lifeless girl they were going to leave on the rocks at the base of the bluff?

The big car was driving slowly along the curving road into the park now. It wouldn't be long—

"Stop here!" Schmidt was sitting forward in the seat, studying the road ahead. "There is a little drive, off to the right. Turn the car in there, Max, and switch off the lights. There must be no mistake now."

The big black sedan would be well concealed in this lonely by-road, Wendy thought.

Krueger got out after the car stopped. He was still holding the gun pointed toward Wendy, even while he opened the front door of the sedan and reached into the glove compartment.

"Max, give me your handkerchief," he ordered. "Mine has an initial. And I forgot to bring a towel from the hotel for the chloroform."

The stolid chauffeur obeyed.

"Get out." Schmidt prodded Wendy.

She stepped down from the car, took a deep sighing breath, and squared her shoulders. At least, she could go to her death courageously.

Schmidt took a flashlight from the car, and led the way. "I don't like to use this—might be noticed by picnickers in the park," he complained. "But it is so dark we might stumble in the path."

Wendy's mind was suddenly functioning at lightning-like speed as she followed the bobbing circle of light along the narrow trail. Krueger was just behind her—so close, she could hear his short, excited breathing.

There was just one possible trick she might play. She'd try it—

The odds were a million to one, but she'd take them.

"Don't try any tricks," Krueger warned, as if he had read her mind.

"Yess. It iss useless for you to try to escape," Schmidt said. "We are two against one—more than that. We have a gun. And you are only a silly little American girl. We do better with our youth in Germany."

Wendy couldn't resist the chance at a bitter retort. "It is too bad you couldn't have your brilliant son, Kurt, in Germany. Perhaps he could shine there. Here, he is considered only a moron. Is that why you have a tutor for him, Mr. Schmidt? Is he too stupid for our American schools?"

Wendy had raked a raw spot. The fat man ahead whirled and struck her a savage blow on the mouth.

The girl went on, unheeding. "And the Germans are such fine, cultured gentlemen, too!"

"Shut up, you silly fool!" Krueger shouted. "Do you want a beating?"

"Why not?" Wendy taunted recklessly. "When the police find my body, they'll know I gave myself a good spanking before I jumped over the cliff!"

Schmidt turned to the tutor, his pompous dignity recaptured. "Let her talk, Krueger. Her words are so much empty air. And they are her last ones, remember."

He marched on.

But now Wendy was silent. She was breathing deeply, and walking with a maddening slowness. She must conserve every ounce of her power if her ruse were to work.

The path was nearing the top of the bluff. She

could see the dim outlines of the white railing at the edge of the cliff.

"This is the place," Schmidt announced. He snapped off the flashlight.

Wendy watched, an icy band of fear around her heart. Her eyes soon became accustomed to the darkness. She could see that Krueger had placed the gun on the ground so he could unscrew the top of the bottle of chloroform.

"Be careful that you don't get any of it," Schmidt warned. "It vill make you sick, and you are needed for the rest of this night—and our really important work in the morning."

"Don't worry." The tutor laughed shortly. "I hate the smell of the stuff."

"I'll hold her arms," Schmidt said, "while you put the handkerchief over her nose."

Wendy, as unobtrusively as possible, had been taking deeper and deeper breaths of the fresh air. She didn't struggle when the fat man grasped her arms. But she took a deep breath and held it as Krueger approached with the evil square of white.

She closed her eyes. She held her breath until she thought the throbbing veins in her head would burst through her temples. Then she slumped suddenly against the fat German.

"There, that got her!" She heard the cry of satisfaction from the tutor.

"Goot! Now you take her feet and I'll carry her shoulders. We'll dump her over the railing."

Wendy forced herself to keep her eyes shut and lie completely relaxed as they dragged her over the rough ground.

"It's only—nine o'clock," Schmidt panted. "It gives us—time to go back to the hotel—and talk with Chicago. We'll have time—to stop at a few—taverns."

"That's right. But don't forget, we have to meet Alexander at the hotel in Green Bay in time to help him with those bombs."

Schmidt grunted. "Yess. It would be better to telephone Schimmel on the way."

The fat man was puffing and muttering under his breath as he and Krueger lifted Wendy over the railing. There was a narrow shelf of rock beyond the rail.

They dropped the helpless girl to the hard earth. It took all her will power to keep from crying out with the pain. She knew she would be horribly bruised from this rough treatment.

"There!" Schmidt exclaimed. "Now, just give her a shove with your foot through the rail. She's right on the edge—"

Wendy was falling—falling—

CHAPTER XXV

ON THE BRIDLE PATH

"This is no nightmare," Wendy thought grimly. "This is really happening to me!"

She stretched her arms high above her head, and pointed her toes straight down. She'd planned this move. If she were lucky enough to hit the water, she'd strike it in as expert form as possible.

The air whistled past her ears. It drove her breath back into her lungs.

The shock of the chill water was delicious, and the resounding splash was the sweetest music Wendy had ever heard.

But her troubles were far from over. It was awkward trying to swim in her heavy sport oxfords, but she didn't dare kick them off. She would need them scrambling up the rocky cliff. Fortunately, her thin cotton uniform didn't hamper the stroke of her arms, and she swam toward the rocky mass, using a skillful overarm.

A thin moon gave a little light now, and she

threaded her way through the jagged rocks which she had so miraculously missed.

Exhausted and breathing heavily, she reached the base of the bluff at last. She grasped a rounded projection of rock with one hand, and brushed back the wet strands of hair with the other. She rested a moment, but the cold chill of the water seemed to penetrate to her bones.

With a great effort she pulled herself from the water, and sat for a moment on the rock to which she'd been clinging.

Not until then did Wendy notice that she was helplessly marooned. The nearest ledge wide enough to hold her was ten feet above her head. On either side were sheer, vertical stretches of rock.

She was terribly cold. She shuddered at the realization that her only hope of escape was the water! She'd have to go back and swim through the darkness, searching for a break in the bluff where she could climb to the park above.

Wait! She remembered seeing an old, weathered stairway on the face of the cliff. She had noticed it several times when she was out on the lake in Duke's motor boat. She closed her eyes in a desperate attempt to visualize its location. Had it been to the right or the left of the outer-

most point of the bluff where Schmidt and Krueger had attempted to hurl her to destruction?

Wendy decided it was to the right, and she plunged back into the black, cold water.

She was tiring now. Her progress around the rock obstructions was slow. Doggedly, she kept on going, watching always for the whitened logs of the old rustic stairs.

Just as she was beginning to lose all her courage, she saw the narrow ledge of rock just above the water line.

This time she didn't dare rest when she pulled herself from the water. She had to keep moving.

The weather-beaten stairs were rickety and dangerous. Wendy had to test each step with her weight before going forward. The hand-rails were loose, and it would have been a risky trip even in daylight. Once, a rotten board gave way, and Wendy clutched the step above desperately to break her fall.

Far below, she could see the white-caps dashing against the rocks.

Cautiously, but with as much speed as she could manage, she climbed the hundreds of steps to the top.

It was lighter up here out of the shadow cast by the bluff. Wendy leaned against the chain sus-

pended across the top step and rested a moment. The breeze was brisker, too. It whipped her wet clothing relentlessly.

There was a wooden sign suspended from the chain, and she made out the word "DANGER" printed on it.

She uttered a shaky laugh and cried aloud: "You're telling me!"

There was the sound of cantering hooves approaching. Wendy stiffened involuntarily.

Then she staggered toward the sound. "Help!" she shouted. "Please help me!"

What if they shouldn't hear?

She ran faster, almost sobbing as she called.

She tripped at the edge of the bridle path and fell almost in front of the horses. The riders reined in shortly. Both dismounted at once.

"What's the matter?" It was a girl's voice.

"I must get to—to a telephone!" Wendy gasped. "It's a matter of life and death!"

"Why, you're soaking wet!" the other, older woman exclaimed.

"Yes." Wendy told the truth simply. "I was thrown off the bluff into the lake by a couple of Nazi agents. They're plotting to destroy a lot of docks and a radio station and some coast guard boats at seven o'clock in the morning. I found it out—and they thought they had killed me."

"Poor thing! You've had a horrible shock!" The older woman helped Wendy to her feet.

"We'd better take her to a doctor, mother," the girl said. "Where do you live?"

"At the Edgewater Inn." Wendy brushed her still-damp hair back from her forehead wearily. "But there's a pay telephone in the park shelter—it's really terribly important. If you'd lend me a nickel—"

"You're going to the doctor immediately," the older woman commanded crisply. "Joan, help me lift her to my horse. I'll lead it back to the stables. We'll take our car—"

Wendy had reached the limit of her endurance. She let the mother and daughter lift her to the saddle of the horse. She slumped forward, too tired to sit erect. She couldn't waste her strength arguing with these women.

"Take me to Doctor Smalley in Cottey," she said, giving up.

Later, she couldn't even remember dismounting, or being carried to the car. The women bundled her in an automobile robe, and drove swiftly to Doctor Smalley's residence.

Wendy jerked back to reality when she was being carried up to the brightly illuminated porch of the doctor's home.

"Doctor Smalley," she said thickly, fighting her

drowsiness, "give me something to wake me up—quick!"

"Good gracious, Wendy, what happened to you?"

"We found her, soaking wet, in the bridle path at Bluff Park," the woman explained. "She'd collapsed there, and was incoherently mumbling some wild tale about Nazi agents throwing her into the lake!"

"What's this, Wendy?" the doctor demanded, sharply. He helped her into a big chair in his reception room.

With an effort Wendy fought off her deadly sleepiness. "Please, Doctor Smalley—may I have a cup of coffee, or tea—?"

The gray-haired physician whom she had known since she was a small child gave her a small tumbler of dark fluid.

"Drink this," he ordered. "You probably need a sandwich and a glass of milk as much as anything."

Wendy drank the bitter-tasting medicine, and managed a wry smile. "I would like something to eat," she confessed. "I haven't had anything since breakfast—"

The doctor left the room hurriedly. "Be back in a minute," he called.

Wendy turned to the attentive women in their

smart riding-habits. "I'll never be able to thank you enough," she said. "And I don't even know your names. I'm Wendy Ralston."

"I'm Mrs. Roger Graham of Oak Park," the woman answered graciously, "and this is my daughter, Joan. We're vacationing at Hilltop Lodge, and we decided it would be a pleasant evening for a ride."

The doctor came back, carrying a tray of meat sandwiches and a cup of tea. "Here, Wendy. How in the world did you ever happen to fall in the lake?"

"I didn't fall." Wendy spoke with deadly seriousness. She *must* convince them! She must make these people believe her fantastic story. "I really was thrown from the bluff. Mr. Schmidt and the tutor thought they'd chloroformed me, but I held my breath and fooled them. When they tossed me off the bluff, I was fortunate and missed the rocks."

"Eat a sandwich and drink the tea, and then tell us the rest," the doctor ordered.

He turned to Mrs. Graham and her daughter, who were staring at Wendy with disbelieving eyes.

"I've known Wendy all her life," he told them. "She's not a girl who would make up such a hair-raising tale just for the fun of it."

"But Nazi agents! In this remote village in Wisconsin!" Mrs. Graham was still unconvinced.

Wendy felt much stronger after the tea. She sat up straight and told them the entire story. The three of them listened with mounting excitement.

Mrs. Graham nodded when the girl had finished. "I believe you now, my dear." She turned to the doctor. "There's an FBI man vacationing at Hilltop with his family. Why couldn't I telephone and have him come here at once? We have no time to lose—"

"She's about my size," Joan Graham added. "Tell him to bring some of my clothes. You must be cold, Wendy, in all those wet things!"

The sparkle was returning to Wendy's eyes, and she answered with a flash of characteristic spirit: "Right now I feel more comfortable and a lot happier than I have all summer!"

CHAPTER XXVI

GOVERNMENT AGENT

"WOULDN'T YOU like me to dress your hair?" Joan Graham offered shyly.

Wendy chuckled. "I know I must look wild—no wonder you and your mother doubted my story. I'm much too excited to do anything about it myself."

Doctor Smalley took the girls to the downstairs guest bedroom. Wendy, still wrapped in the car robe from the Graham car, looked in the mirror.

"My word! You're really taking on a job!" Her honey-colored curls were still wet and plastered to her head in a riotous mass.

Joan took a towel and rubbed Wendy's scalp briskly. "This is so exciting, Wendy! Mother and I were having a nice, but very dull time, until we stumbled on to you!"

She had just finished arranging Wendy's hair in a semblance of order, when Mrs. Graham brought a package of clothes.

"Here's a suit and blouse, and a pair of oxfords," the older woman announced. "I'll help, Joan, because Mr. Barkley is extremely anxious to talk to Wendy right away."

The sheer wool suit of light blue was exquisitely tailored, and Wendy watched her transformation with delight. The color flooded back into her cheeks. Joan added a bit of scarlet to her lips.

"What a break that the shoes fit so perfectly!" Wendy exclaimed. "I'm afraid my soggy sport floogies would ruin the picture."

Mr. Barkley, the agent from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, was standing in Doctor Smalley's office when the trio returned. He was a pleasant-looking man of about forty, tall and slim.

"This is Wendy Ralston," Mrs. Graham announced.

"I can't believe it," the older man declared, smiling in admiration. "If this slip of a girl has uncovered what I suspect—but go on, my dear. Tell me the whole story."

Speaking rapidly, Wendy started at the beginning and told the agent everything. All about the original letter from Mr. Schmidt, engaging rooms at Edgewater Inn; how the various mishaps had driven away the guests not involved in his

plot; and finally, her discovery of the bombs and the sabotage plan.

Everyone in the small office listened with curious intentness, but Wendy watched the reaction of the government agent. His grey eyes grew flinty, and the lean curve of his jaw hardened.

When she had finished, he said, "You've had a pretty thin time of it, haven't you? And their brutal treatment of you tonight is typical—"

He whirled to the doctor. "May I use your telephone for a long-distance call? I want to call the FBI office at Green Bay and put them on the lookout for Schmidt and Alexander, and order a plane.

"Miss Ralston, I'll want you to go with me and identify these men if we're able to capture them. And while the plane is on the way, we'll go back to Edgewater Inn and talk to your friend who visited the Chicago office. He'll remember the address, won't he?"

Wendy nodded. "I was hoping we'd get to go there, before we left. After all, I'd like to know if Uncle Ed sold the Inn—"

"I'll drive you over," Mrs. Graham offered. "And if there is anything at all we can do to help, we'll be delighted."

The girl in the becoming blue suit gave the woman and her daughter one of her most engag-

ing smiles. "You've helped me more than enough now."

The federal agent glanced at his watch. "I have my car and it's almost midnight now. We really won't need your help, longer, Mrs. Graham —unless you want to come along and see if we're successful in rounding up this gang."

"I wouldn't miss it for anything. Joan and I can sleep for a week to make up for this one night."

Doctor Smalley groaned. "I've got three patients to watch tonight, and I don't dare leave my telephone. There are times in every physician's life when he wonders why he was such an idiot to take up this as a life's work—and this is one of them for me!"

"We'll keep you posted," Mrs. Graham promised.

Lights were blazing in most of the rooms at Edgewater Inn when the two cars pulled up in front of the entrance.

Wendy leaped from Mr. Barkley's car and hurried across the porch.

It was a grave-faced and silent group waiting in the reception lobby. Wendy glimpsed Uncle Ed, staring unseeingly at his hands, and Sarah was trying to knit. Miss Abbott sat at the desk near the

telephone. Duke and Eva were playing a game of solitaire.

Wendy flung open the door. It was wonderful to see the group flash to life joyously.

"Wendy! Where have you been?"

"Gosh, are we glad to see you!"

"What happened to you, darling?"

"We've been so worried!"

Wendy held up her hand, helpless against the chorus of exclamations and questions.

"Wait a minute!" She introduced Mr. Barkley who had followed her through the door. As she finished, Mrs. Graham and Joan came in, and she skipped through the names again.

"Are any of the guests in the hotel?" Mr. Barkley broke in.

"Only Mrs. Schmidt and Kurt, and Mrs. Alexander. They were the only ones here for dinner," Miss Abbott said. "That was another reason we were so upset. We couldn't imagine what had happened to Wendy. She just disappeared."

"Are the Boggs still here?" Wendy asked.

Sarah nodded. "They wanted to go to the movie down in Cottey, but I told them they had to stay in case the others came in late for dinner."

"We'll get them later," Mr. Barkley decided. "Maybe Mr. Windsor here could keep an eye on

them for me. And could I see that radio transmission set, Miss Ralston? I may be able to use it."

Wendy led the way, and the puzzled group in the lobby followed.

Sarah reached the end of her patience first. "Wendy, tell me this instant what all this mystery is about."

"Mr. Schmidt is the leader of a Nazi spy ring," the girl said bluntly. "I overheard the plans to blow up the docks in Superior and an airplane factory in Green Bay, and a government radio station. Mr. Schmidt caught me listening. He and Mr. Krueger tried to kill me—they pushed me off the Bluff in the park. Mr. Barkley is a federal agent, and he's going to try to stop them—"

The group listened in stunned silence.

Mr. Barkley turned to Duke, as Wendy unlocked the door of Kurt Schmidt's room. "Do you remember the address of the office you visited in Chicago on that errand for the minister?"

Duke, completely baffled, nodded. "Sure. It's on South Dearborn, near the station."

"Good."

Wendy had the door open. As she had suspected, the room wasn't used by Kurt Schmidt. He probably had been sleeping with the tutor,

while his room had been a combination storeroom for the bombs and a radio plant.

She switched on the overhead light.

"Fine!" the federal agent exclaimed. "It's a powerful little transmitter. I think I can use it."

He adjusted some knobs on the front of the panel, and started signalling.

He was calling the government radio station; sounding the alarm.

The tiny room was packed, and breathlessly silent, except for one interruption as the agent went about his work.

Sarah had slipped away, unobtrusively, and then returned. There was a grin of triumph on her face as she whispered to Wendy, "The Boggs girls were in their room. I could hear'em jabbering away. So I just locked 'em in. If they get out, they'll have to jump from the third-floor window."

Mr. Barkley called the Coast Guard station at Duluth and gave his warning. Thanks to Duke's good memory of the Chicago headquarter's address, that spot was put under surveillance. The Rev. Mr. Ebermeyer's ancient car would be spotted easily as he approached Chicago with his twenty packages of violent destruction.

The government radio station had been warned first of all.

Green Bay reported back that a systematic check was being made of all the hotels, looking for Alexander, and that a defensive net of alert guards had been posted around the airplane factory. Other agents were waiting along the highway for the Schmidt limousine, and it would be trailed as soon as it was spotted.

Mr. Barkley finally removed the ear-phones and turned to Wendy. "Our plane should be at the Cottey airport in ten minutes. Are you ready?"

"We'll be up, waiting to hear the news, when you get back," Uncle Ed promised.

"My goodness gracious, I forgot!" Wendy exclaimed, pausing as she trotted down the hall after the hurrying Mr. Barkley. "Uncle Ed, you didn't sell Edgewater Inn, did you? Mr. Schmidt was the one who was trying to buy it!"

Her uncle waved her on. "Don't worry about it now, Wendy. We'll tell you all about it later."

CHAPTER XXVII

ROUND-UP

WENDY NEVER forgot the wild race to the airport in Mr. Barkley's car, nor the later, thrilling flight through the night sky in the powerful trimotored government plane.

During the brief flight Mr. Barkley questioned Wendy closely about her guests. She described the Pattons, Lindsley and Thompson, and the Alexanders to the last detail. She told of her moving conversation with the pathetic Mrs. Alexander; she described the blue-prints she'd found from the Brooklyn Navy Yard which had started the whole chain of discoveries.

The federal agent was silent for a long time, pondering Wendy's information. Finally, as the plane signalled to the landing field in Green Bay, he said, "Miss Ralston, if your Mr. Schmidt is the man I suspect, you have done an invaluable service to your country. We've almost had him a half-dozen times, but he's always been slick enough to get away with any incriminating evi-

dence. About three months ago, he slipped out of sight completely."

The sun was just coming up as the plane settled on the smooth runway of the Green Bay airport. Two men rushed from the hangar to greet them.

"We've got your man spotted," the first fellow reported to Mr. Barkley. "As you suggested, we didn't arrest him, because we thought he might lead us to the other pair. When we left headquarters, there had been no word of Schmidt's car."

"Right," Mr. Barkley snapped. "I'm pretty sure Schmidt is the man we want most of all."

"Do you want to check with headquarters by telephone?"

"Good idea."

Mr. Barkley introduced the two new agents, Fred Alvin and Pete Dunkerton, to Wendy as they hurried to the hangar.

When Barkley returned from the telephone booth, he was smiling grimly. "Alexander has left his hotel," he reported, "and is heading for the factory."

"It's a couple of miles south of here," Pete Dunkerton volunteered. "Shall we go?"

"Of course. They think at the office that Schmidt has arranged a rendezvous near the plant. There'll be plenty of men, with all the the guards

around the factory and the others tailing Alexander, and the cars following Schmidt."

Just as they were entering Dunkerton's car, Mr. Barkley turned to Wendy. "Say, I never thought. This might be a little dangerous. Would you rather stay here at the hangar? We could bring them here for identification."

"I wouldn't miss it for the world, if you'll let me come," Wendy replied.

"I don't think there'll be any trouble," Pete Dunkerton told her, "because we've got 'em outnumbered. But if there's any shooting, drop to the floor of the car. The windows are supposed to be bullet-proof."

"I can assure you these men are armed," Wendy said a little bitterly. "And Lindsley and Thompson have a half-dozen bombs. They will be desperate."

Ten minutes later Pete Dunkerton drew the car to a slow stop beside the curb of a side street.

A man dressed in faded work clothes and carrying a lunch basket, lounged toward them. "The first car is parked in the next block." He indicated the direction with a nod of his head. "The other car came inside the north city limits ten minutes ago. Be along any time."

"All the men posted?" Fred Alvin asked.

"There are a dozen of us," the man answered,

"and twenty more within whistling distance."

"Good." Barkley checked his wristwatch with the clock on the dashboard of the car. "Just about right. Didn't you say the bombs were to be placed and set ticking at six this morning?"

Wendy nodded.

"It's ten minutes until six."

Pete Dunkerton tuned up the short-wave radio and a deliberate voice filled the car. Wendy was tense with excitement as she listened. "— rounded up Lindsley in Superior and Thompson in Duluth, and confiscated the time bombs. Chicago reported the arrest of Ebermeyer with twenty of the bombs. Our agents are waiting in the Chicago headquarters for the others. They will be arrested as they come to work."

"Here comes Mr. Schmidt!" Wendy exclaimed. The familiar black car was rolling rapidly down the street they faced, and the girl caught a glance of Max Meyer at the wheel.

Pete Dunkerton pushed the starter button, and his car moved slowly around the corner.

The Schmidt sedan had rolled to a stop behind Harry Alexander's roadster. The rabbit-faced musician was on the sidewalk, approaching the sedan.

Immediately a half-dozen men darted out of nearby doorways with guns drawn.

Not a shot was fired.

Wendy was oddly deflated as she watched the quiet scene.

By the time Wendy's group had drawn up at the rear of the Schmidt car and reached the sidewalk, the other agents had skilfully removed the guns from the Nazi agents' holsters.

Harry Alexander looked ready to cry. His weak chin working convulsively. He took out his handkerchief and started to lift it to his face.

"Grab that handkerchief," Mr. Barkley snapped.

The nearest government man snatched the square of linen.

"Get all their handkerchiefs," the agent ordered.

Baffled, Wendy watched.

"It's an old trick," Mr. Barkley explained in a low tone as he unknotted the corner of the handkerchief taken from Alexander. "Cyanide tablets. It's a ruthless rule of the Nazi organization. They are as reckless with the lives of their own men as they are with ours. If they are captured, they must commit suicide rather than give up any of Der Fuehrer's sacred secrets."

Wendy glanced up from the deadly little pills in the agent's palm.

Schmidt was staring at her as if he were seeing

all the devils in Hades. "You!" he blurted, his face purpling. "You little snoop!" he sputtered wrathfully. "You will pay for this! Der Fuehrer's men do not forget their enemies—"

"Neither do we," Mr. Barkley interrupted, his face cold and bleak. "Miss Ralston has paid all she's going to in her suffering last night. Your sabotage and spying are finished, Baron von Heltstofen."

CHAPTER XXVIII

SARAH'S SURPRISE

"YOUR MR. SCHMIDT is really Baron von Heltstofen," Mr. Barkley explained to Wendy. "He has been in charge of co-ordinating all the espionage, propaganda and sabotage for the Nazis in Canada, Mexico and the United States."

Wendy nodded. "I can understand a lot of things that have been bothering me. But there are still a few points. Mr. Schmidt, what are pea shooters?"

The plump baron tried to turn his back to the girl, but his captors held him more tightly.

"Perhaps I could explain," Mr. Barkley offered. "Why do you ask, Wendy?"

"Well, one evening, I heard the Reverend Ebermeyer say 'I can furnish an unlimited number of the standard size pea shooters at no advance in price' to Mr. Schmidt."

"Guns, Wendy. Probably for a plotted revolution in one of the small South American countries. Or even for Mexico. Another link in Hitler's chain called 'divide, confuse and conquer.' "

"Then Bob and Mary Patton were probably his agents in Canada. Mr. Alexander, here, is from Los Angeles, and the minister from Kansas. Lindsley and Thompson registered from Brooklyn. Mr. Schmidt was just using Edgewater Inn for a centralized conference spot, wasn't he?"

Mr. Barkley nodded to the other men. "Take the baron and his friends to headquarters. Miss Ralston and I will fly back to Cottey right now to clear up odds and ends. Mr. Schmidt probably left some pretty valuable papers, along with his fine transmitter and his family."

Wendy went to sleep on the brief ride back to the Green Bay airport. She didn't even wake up when she was gently carried to the plane.

She was roused abruptly, however, when the big flying ship settled down on the Cottey field. The entire staff of the Edgewater Inn—except the Boggs sisters—was waiting.

And it was a royal reception for a returning heroine. Even the glorious June sunshine was made to order.

Duke had news, and as soon as the hubbub of greeting was over, he excitedly told Mr. Barkley and Wendy of what he had learned while they were flying back to Cottey.

"I talked with the FBI headquarters in Chicago, and they've identified all the prisoners," he said.

"Bob and Mary Patton are really a German couple, who escaped from a prison camp in Canada. That's how they helped those German aviators get this far. Jennie and Mamie Boggs were in the plot up to their necks. Pro-Nazi Czechs—"

"I finally remembered where I had seen Mr. Lindsley," Miss Abbott broke in. "He was a captured officer from the German Navy during the last war. I took care of him in that Paris hospital I told you about, Wendy. If only I could have remembered that earlier."

Sarah was standing back of Uncle Ed's wheelchair, a little apart from the noisy group. Both were beaming at Wendy proudly.

"Oh, dear!" Wendy exclaimed, suddenly contrite. "I'm afraid I'd forgotten what all this means to Edgewater Inn. We won't have a single guest left."

Mr. Barkley laughed. "I meant to tell you sooner, Miss Ralston, that the Baron von Heltstofen had a substantial price on his head—five thousand dollars. I shall certainly see that you get the reward for his capture. Besides, my wife and youngsters will be delighted to take over the baron's suite for the three weeks we'll be here. And I shouldn't be surprised if Mrs. Graham and her daughter will join us. What's more, the mag-

nificent publicity you'll receive for your brilliant and courageous work last night will bring in many visitors."

Wendy's smile was glorious. She bent to kiss her uncle's forehead. "That will save the day for us, Uncle Ed! We aren't going to lose Edgewater Inn, after all! If I can show a profit for the rest of the summer, maybe we can even get the bank to renew our loan!"

Sarah chuckled. "The bank has nothin' to do with it now, Wendy. I had some savin's not doin' anything, so I took over the mortgage yesterday. If you miss the interest payments a few years, until you get through that college course you're so all-fired set on, it's all right with me. I ain't in no rush for the money."

Wendy, suddenly overcome with exhaustion and emotion, started to sob happily on Sarah's bony shoulder. "And all the time—I thought—you didn't *want* me to make good!"

Duke, standing with his hands in his pockets, shook his head wonderingly at the touching scene. "I can't understand it," he muttered. "I haven't found a four-leaf clover in more than a week. I got out of bed on the wrong side yesterday morning, and I broke a mirror. I never thought we'd see the end of the jinx, and now look at us!"

THE END